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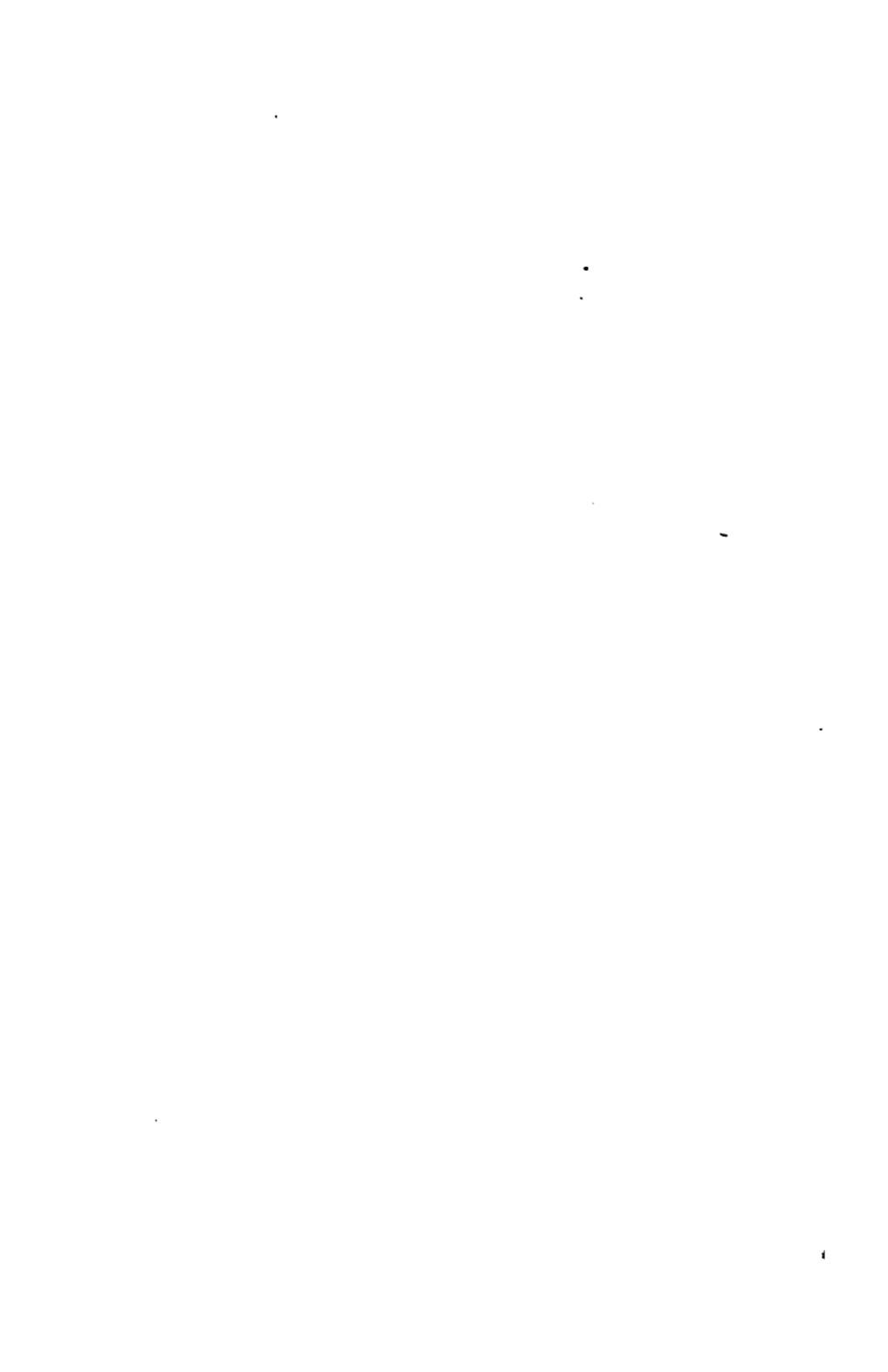
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B E S S Y R A N E

A Novel

BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF

“EAST LYNNE,” “THE CHANNINGS,” “ROLAND YORKE,”
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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BESSY RANE.

CHAPTER I.

RICHARD NORTH'S REVELATION.

FOR a wonder, the dinner-table at Dallory Hall was a solitary one. Solitary, in so far as that only the family then at home sat at it. Madam headed it ; Mr. North was at the foot ; Richard on one side ; Matilda on the other. Scarcely a word was being spoken. Madam was in one of her imperious humours indeed, when was she out of them ?—the servants waited in silence.

Suddenly there rang out a loud crashing peal from the hall-bell. Richard, who was already beginning to be disturbed by vague fears of what his ex-workman's hostilities might bring them to do, sat back in his chair absently, and turned his head.

“Are you expecting any one, Dick?” asked his father.

“No, sir. Unless it be a message to call me out.”

It was, however, a message to call out Mr. North; not Richard. Mrs. Cumberland wanted to see him. “On the instant,” the servant added: for that was what Jelly had imperatively said.

Mr. North laid down his knife and fork and stared at the man. He did not understand.

“Mrs. Cumberland is at Eastsea,” he cried.

“No, sir, she has just got home, and she wants to see you very particular. It’s the lady’s maid who has brought the message.”

“Mr. North cannot go,” broke forth Madam loudly to the servant. “Go and say so.”

But Jelly, to whom the words penetrated as she stood in the hall, had no notion of her mistress’s wishes being set at nought by Madam. Jelly had a great deal of calm moral and physical courage—in spite of the supernatural terrors that had recently held influence over her—some persons might have said her share of calm impudence also: and she made no ceremony of putting her black bonnet, shiny with wet, inside the room.

"My mistress is dying, sir; I don't think there can be a doubt of it," she said, advancing to Mr. North. She wishes to say a few last words to you, if you'll please to come. There's no time to be lost, sir."

"Bless me!—poor Fanny!" cried Mr. North, rising: and his hands began to tremble a little. "I'll come at once, Jelly."

"You will *not*," spoke Madam, as if she were issuing an imperial edict.

"I must," said Mr. North. "She is dying, Madam, don't you hear?"

"I say No, you will not."

"The wishes of the dying must be respected by the living," interposed Jelly, still to Mr. North. "Otherwise there's no telling what ghosts might haunt 'em after."

The grammar was rather obscure, but the meaning of the words plain enough. Mr. North took a step or two towards the door: Madam came round and put herself before him, with her intercepting words:

"My will is law in this house, and out of it you do not go."

For a minute or two the master (the master!) of Dallory Hall looked utterly helpless, as if he were going to cry like a child. Then he

cast an appealing look at his son. Richard rose, laying down his table-napkin.

“Leave the room for an instant,” he quietly said to the servants, including Jelly. And they filed out.

“My dear father, is it your wish to see Mrs. Cumberland?”

“Oh, Dick, you know it is,” spoke the poor brow-beaten man. “There’s not much left to me in life now to care for ; but if I let her die without going to her there’ll be less.”

“Then you shall go,” said Richard. Madam turned to him ; passion in her eye, and on her tongue.

“How *dare* you attempt to oppose me, Richard North ? I say your father shall not go forth at the beck and call of this crazy woman.”

“Madam, I say he shall,” calmly spoke Richard.

“Do you defy me ? Has it come to that ?”

“Why yes, if you force me to : it is not my fault. Pardon me if I speak plainly—if I set you right upon one point, Madam,” he added. “You have just said your will is law in the house and out of it : in future it must, on some occasions, yield to mine. This is one.

RICHARD NORTH'S REVELATION.

My father will go to Mrs. Cumberland's. Say no more, Madam : it will be useless ; and I am going to admit the servants."

From sheer amazement Madam was still. Resolution—the resolution born of conscious power to will and to execute—lay in every tone and glance of Richard North. Before she could collect her energies, the door was opened to the servants, and she heard Richard's order to make ready and bring round the close carriage instantly. Instantly.

"Mr. North will be with your mistress as soon as you are, Jelly," said he. And Jelly nodded, as she took her departure.

But there ensued a scene. Madam had called Mrs. Cumberland a crazy woman : she seemed nothing less than one herself. Whatever her private objection might have been to her husband's holding an interview with Mrs. Cumberland—and there could be no question that she had one—Richard fairly thought she was going mad in her frenzied attempts to prevent it. She stamped, she raved, she threatened Mr. North, defying him to go, she violently pushed him into his chair backwards, she ordered the servants to bar the house doors against his egress, she rushed round to

the stables herself and countermanaged the carriage ; she was in fact as nearly mad, as a woman, short of being a caged lunatic, can be. Matilda cried : indifferent as that young lady remained in general to her mother's ordinary fits of temper, she was frightened now. The servants collected in dark nooks of the hall, and stood peeping : Mr. North stole into his parlour, and thence, by the window, to a bench in the garden, where he sat in the dark and the rain, shaking in every limb. Of his own accord he had surely never dared to go, after this : but Richard was his sheet anchor. Richard alone maintained his calm equanimity, and carried matters through. The servants obeyed his slightest word, only the lift of his finger : with sure instinct they saw who could be, and was, the Hall's real master : and the carriage at length came to the door.

But all this had caused delay. And more might have been caused—for what will an unrestrained and determined woman not do—but that just as the wheels, grating on the wet gravel, struck on Madam's ear, her violence culminated in a kind of fainting fit. For the time at least she could not move, and

Richard took the opportunity to put his father in the carriage. It was astonishing how confidently the old man trusted to Richard's protection. He clung to his hand.

"Won't you come also, Dick? I hardly dare go alone. She'd be capable of coming after me, you know."

Richard's answer was to step in and sit down beside his father. It was eight o'clock when they got to Mrs. Cumberland's. Jelly, with a reproachful face, showed them into a sitting-room.

"You can't go up now, sir; you'll have to wait," said she.

"Is she any better?" asked Richard.

"She's worse," replied Jelly; "getting weaker and weaker with every quarter of an hour. Dr. Rane thinks she'll last till morning. I don't. The clergyman's up there now."

And when the time came for Mr. North to be introduced into the room, Mrs. Cumberland was almost past speaking to him. They were alone—for she motioned others away. Mr. North never afterwards settled with himself what the especial point could have been that she had wished to say to him: unless it was

the request that he should take charge of Ellen Adair.

Her words were faint and few, and apparently disjointed, at times seeming to have no connection the one with the other. Mr. North—sitting on a chair close in front of her, holding one of her hands, bending down his ear to catch what fell from her white lips—thought her mind wandered a little. She asked him to protect Ellen Adair—to take her home to the Hall until she should be claimed by her husband or her father. It might be but a few days, she added, before the former came, and he would probably wish the marriage to take place at once ; if so, it had better. Then she went on to say something about Arthur Bohun, which Mr. North could not catch at all. And then she passed abruptly to the past matter of the anonymous letter.

“John, you will forgive it ! You will forgive it !” she implored, feebly clasping the hand in which hers lay.

“Forgive that ?” returned Mr. North, not in dissent but in surprise that she should speak on the subject.

“For my sake, John. We were dear

friends and playfellows in the old days—though you were older than me. You'll forgive it won't you, John, for my sake ; because I am dying, and because I ask it of you ?”

“ Yes, I will,” said John North : “ I don't think as much about it as I did,” he added. “ I'd like to forgive everybody and everything before I go, Fanny ; and my turn mayn't be long now. I forgive it heartily ; heartily,” he repeated, thinking to content her. “ Fanny, I never thought you'd go before me.”

“ God bless you ! God reward you !” she murmured. “ There was no ill intention, you know, John.”

John North did not see why he merited reward, neither could he follow what she was talking of. It might be, he supposed, one of the hallucinations of mind that sometimes attend the dying.

“ I'll take every care of Ellen Adair : she shall come to the Hall and stay there,” he said, for that he could understand. “ I promise it faithfully to you, Fanny.”

“ Then that is one of the weights off my mind,” murmured the dying woman. “ There were so many on it. I have left a paper, John, naming you and Richard her guardians

for the time being. She's of good family, and very precious to her father. There has been so short a space to act in : it was only three or four days ago that I knew the end was coming. I did not expect it would be quite so soon."

" It mostly comes when it's not expected," murmured poor John North : " there's a many of us seem to be going very near together. Edmund was the first ; then Bessy ; now it's you, Fanny : and the next will be me. God in His mercy grant that we may all meet in a happier world, and be together for ever !"

Richard North had remained below in the dining-room with Ellen Adair. The heavy crimson curtains were drawn before the large garden window, a bright fire blazed in the grate. Ellen in her black dress, worn for Bessy, sat in the warmth : she felt very chilly after her journey, was nervous at the turn the illness seemed to be taking ; and every now and then a tear stole silently down her sweet face. Richard walked about a little as he glanced at her. He thought her looking, apart from the present sorrow, pale and ill. Richard North was deliberating whether to say a word or two upon a matter that puzzled him. He thought he would.

“I have been across the channel, you know, Ellen, since you left for Eastsea,” he began. He had grown sufficiently intimate at Mrs. Cumberland’s, after his enforced term of idleness set-in, to drop the formal “Miss Adair” for her Christian name. And she had always called him “Richard”: or “Mr. Richard.”

“Yes, we heard of it. You went to engage workmen, did you not?”

“Something of that. When I got back home, I found a letter or two waiting for me from Arthur Bohtun, who was then at Eastsea. Madam had opened one.”

Ellen looked up, and then down again immediately. Richard North saw a change pass over her face, as though she were startled.

“I could not quite understand the letters; I think Arthur intended me not to fully understand them. They spoke of some—some event that was coming off, at which he wished me to be present.”

Ellen saw that he did understand: at least, that he believed he did. She rose from her seat and went close to him, speaking in agitation.

“Will you grant me a request, Richard?

I know you can be a firm friend ; you are very true. Do not ever think of it again—do not speak of it to living man or woman.”

“ I presume it did *not* take place, Ellen.”

“ No. And the sooner it is altogether forgotten, the better.”

He took her hand between his, and drew her to the fire. They stood before it side by side.

“ I am glad you know that I am your firm and true friend, Ellen ; you may trust me always. It is neither idle curiosity nor impertinence that makes me speak. Madam stopped it, I conclude.”

“ I suppose so. She came and fetched him away ; James Bohun was dying and wanted him. Since then I—I hardly know. He never came down again. He has been very ill.”

“ Yes, very. Let him get his health again ; it will be all right. That’s all, my dear. I should like to take a little care of you as though you were my sister.”

“ Care !” she replied. “ Oh Richard, I don’t see what will become of me, or where I shall go. They say Mrs. Cumberland will not live till morning ; and papa, you know, is so far away.”

Jelly appeared with some coffee ; and stayed for a minute or two to gossip, after the bent of her own heart. The carriage and the horses and the coachman were waiting outside in the rain. Dr. Rane was in and out, in his restlessness. It was an anxious night with him. He would, how willingly ! have restored his mother for a time, had human skill alone been necessary to do it.

Before the interview with Mr. North was over—and it did not last twenty minutes—Mrs. Cumberland had changed considerably. Her son went into the room as Mr. North left it ; and he saw at once how fallacious was the hope he had entertained of her lasting until morning.

Poor Mr. North, broken alike in health and heart, weak in spirit almost as a child, burst into a fit of tears as soon as he entered the dining-room. Richard spoke a few soothing words to him : Ellen Adair, who had rarely, if ever, seen a man cry, stood aghast.

“They are all going, Dicky,” he sobbed ; “all going one by one. We were a'most boy and girl together ; I a big one, Fanny a little mite that I'd often hold on my knee. I loved the child ; she was as pretty a little

thing as you'd wish to see. She's younger than me by a good deal, and I never thought she'd go before me. There'll be only you left, Dicky ; only you."

Ellen touched Richard's elbow : she held a cup of coffee in her hand. "If he can be brought to drink it, it may do him good," she whispered, crying for company.

Mr. North drank the coffee. Afterwards, when he had sat awhile—breaking out ever and anon with the reminiscences of the old days—he said he should like another cup. Richard, as he handed it to him, reminded him that the carriage was waiting ; upon which Mr. North, who had quite forgotten the fact, tried to drink it all down at once, and had a fit of choking.

"I'd like to know how she is before I go, Dicky," he said when it was over. "Whether there's any change."

A change indeed. Even as the words left his lips, some slight commotion was heard in the house, following upon Dr. Rane's voice, who had come out of the chamber to speak. The last moment was at hand. Ellen Adair went up, and Jelly went up. Mr. North said he must wait a bit longer.

In five minutes all was over. Ellen Adair, brought down by Dr. Rane, was convulsed with grief. Mr. North said she should go back with them to the Hall, and bade Jelly find what things she might want. At first Ellen refused: it seemed strangely sudden, almost unseemly, to go out of the house thus immediately; but when she came to reflect how lonely and undesirable would be her position if she stayed in it, she grew eager to go. To tell the truth, she felt half afraid to stay: she had never been in personal contact with death, and the idea lay upon her as a dread to be shrunk from.

So a small portmanteau was hastily repacked—not an hour had elapsed since it was unpacked—and taken out to the carriage, Jelly undertaking to send the larger box in the morning. And Ellen was in the carriage driving to the Hall with Mr. North and Richard.

“I am glad to come,” she said to them, catching up her breath. “It is so very kind of you to receive me in this extremity.”

“Not at all, my dear,” answered Mr. North. “The Hall will be your home until we get instructions from your father. Mrs.

Cumberland has appointed me and Richard as your temporary guardians : I was telling Dick so when you were upstairs."

And Ellen burst into fresh tears, and said again and again how kind it was of them. Richard North felt that he loved her as dearly as any sister.

But there would be words to the bargain : they had not taken Madam into consideration. The supposition that she would object to it never occurred to Mr. North or Richard ; Madam was so very fond of having company at Dallory Hall. When the coachman, tired of being in the wet, dashed up at a canter, and they descended and entered into the blaze of light, and Madam, standing a little back, saw the young lady and the luggage, her face of surprise was a picture.

"What does this intrusion mean ?" she *demanded*, slowly advancing.

"It means, Madam, that Mrs. Cumberland is dead, and that she has left Miss Adair in my charge and Dick's for a bit," answered Mr. North with trembling courtesy, remembering the frightful mood he had run away from. While Richard, catching the ominous words and eye of Madam, hastily took Ellen

into the drawing-room, introduced her to Matilda, and shut the door on them.

“ You say Mrs. Cumberland is dead !” had been Madam’s next words to Mr. North.

“ Yes, she’s dead. It has been frightfully sudden.”

“ What did she want with you ?” resumed Madam, her voice sinking almost to a whisper ; and, but that Mr. North was not an observant man, he might have seen her very lips growing white with some dread suspense.

“ I don’t know what she wanted,” he replied—“ unless it was the promise from me to take care of Miss Adair. She was nearly past speaking when I got to see her ; things had made me late, Madam.”

“ Did she—did she—. By the commotion that woman, Jelly, made one would have supposed her mistress had some vast secret to impart,” broke off Madam. “ Had she ?”

“ Had who ?” asked Mr. North, rather losing the thread of the dialogue.

“ Mrs. Cumberland,” said Madam, with a slight stamp. And, in spite of her assumed careless petulance, she watched her husband’s face for the answer as if she were watching

for one of life or death. "Did she impart to you any—any private matter?"

"She had none to impart, Madam, that I am aware of. I shouldn't think she had. She rambled in her talk a bit, as the dying will do; about our old days, and about the anonymous letter that killed Edmund. There was nothing else, except that she wanted me to take temporary charge of Miss Ellen Adair, until we can hear from her father."

Mr. North was too simply-honest to deceive, and Madam believed him. Her old arrogance resumed its sway as fear died out.

"What did she tell you about *him*—the father?"

"Nothing; not a word, Madam: what should she? I tell you her mind and her speech were both all but gone. She rambled on about the old days and the anonymous letter, and I couldn't follow her even in that, but she said nothing else."

All was right then. The old will and the old arrogance were in full swing now; Madam was herself again.

"Miss Adair goes back to Mrs. Cumberland's to-night," said she. "I do not receive her, or permit her to remain here."

“ Eh ?—what ?” cried Mr. North ; and Richard, who had been stepping up, stood still to listen. “ Why not, Madam ?”

“ Because I do not choose to,” said Madam. “ That's why.”

“ Madam, I'd not do it for the world. Send her back to the house with the dead lying in it, and where she'd have no protector ! I couldn't do it. She's but a young thing. The neighbours would cry shame upon me.”

“ She goes back at once,” spoke Madam in her most decisive tones. “ The carriage may take her, as it rains ; but back she goes.”

“ It can't be, Madam, it can't, indeed. I'm her guardian, now, and responsible. I promised that she should stay at Dallory Hall.”

And Madam went forthwith into another of her furious rages ; she stamped and shook with passion. Not at being thwarted : her will was law always, and she intended it to be so now ; but at Mr. North's *attempting* to oppose it.

“ You were a fool for bringing her at all, knowing as you might that I should not

allow her to stay," stamped Madam. "The hall is mine: so long as I am mistress of it, no girl picked up anywhere on a wet night, no brat at fault for a place to put her head in, shall find admittance here. *She goes back at once.*"

Mr. North seemed ready to drop. The piteous look of hopeless despair, piteous in its utter helplessness, laid hold of his face. Richard drew nearer, and he caught sight of him. All this had taken place in the hall under the great lamp.

"Dick, What's to be done?" wailed Mr. North. "I should die of the shame of turning her out again. I wish I could die; I've been wishing it many times to-night. It's time I was gone, Dick, when I've no longer a roof to offer a poor young lady a week or two's shelter under."

"But you have one, my dear father. At least, I have, which comes to the same thing," added Richard, calmly composed as usual. "Madam"—politely, but nevertheless authoritatively taking Madam's hand to lead her into the dining-room—"will you pardon me if I interfere in this?"

"It is no business of yours," said Madam.

“Excuse me, Madam, but it is. I think I had better take it on myself exclusively, and relieve my father—for really, what with one thing and another, he is not capable of bearing much.”

“Oh Dick, do ; do !” interposed poor Mr. North, timorously following them into the dining-room. “You are strong, Dick, and I am weak. I was strong once, though.”

“Madam,” said Richard, “this young lady, Miss Adair, will remain here at the Hall until we get instructions from her father.”

Madam was turning livid. Richard had never taken such a tone until to-night. And this was the second time ! She would have liked to strike him. Had he been some worthless animal, her manner could not have expressed more gratuitous contempt.

“By what right, pray, do *you* interfere ?”

“Well, Madam, Mrs. Cumberland expressed a wish that I, as well as my father, should act as Miss Adair’s guardian.”

“There’s a paper left that says it,” eagerly put in Mr. North.

“And what though you were appointed fifty times over, and fifty to that ; do you suppose it would give you the right to bring

her here—to thrust her into my home?" shrieked Madam. "Don't you believe it, Richard North."

"Madam," said Richard, quietly "the home is mine."

"On sufferance," was her scornful rejoinder. "But I think the sufferance has been allowed too long."

"You have known me now many years, Madam: I do not think in all those years you have found me advance a proposition that I could not substantiate. In saying the home here was mine I spoke what is literally true. I am the lessee of Dallory Hall. You and my father (my dear father"—turning to him—"I know you will pardon me for the few plain words I must speak) are here on sufferance. My guests, as it were."

"It is, every word, Gospel truth," spoke up poor Mr. North, glad to his heart that the moment for her enlightenment had at length come. "Dick holds the lease of Dallory Hall, and he is its real master. For several years now we have all been pensioners on his bounty. He has worked to keep us, Madam, in this his own house; and he has done it nobly and generously."

It seemed to Madam that her brain went whirling about in a maze, for the words brought conviction. Richard the true master! Richard's money that they had been living upon!

"I am grieved to have been obliged to state this, Madam," Richard resumed. "I shall wish never to allude to it further, and I will continue to do the best I can for all. But—in regard to Miss Ellen Adair, she must remain here, and she must be made welcome."

CHAPTER II.

UNDER THE SAME ROOF.

A CRAFTY and worldly-wise cunning woman, like Mrs. North, can change her tactics as readily as the wind changes its quarters. The avowal of Richard, that he was the true master of Dallory Hall, so far as holding all power to act in his hands went—had been the greatest blow to her of any she had experienced in all these later years. It struck, don't you see, the death-warrant of *her* power; for she knew that she should never be allowed to rule again with an unjust and iron hand, as it had been her cruel pleasure to do. In all essential things, where it was needful for him to interfere, she felt that Richard's will and Richard's policy would henceforth outsway her own.

Madam sat in her dressing-room that night,

mentally looking into the future. Or rather striving to look. But it was very dim and misty. The sources whence she had drawn her large supplies were gone ; the unlimited power was gone. Would it be worth while for her to remain at the Hall, she questioned, under the altered circumstances. Since the death of James Bohun, and her short sojourn with Sir Nash, an idea had occasionally crossed her mind that it might be desirable to take up her residence with the baronet—if she could only scheme to accomplish it. From some cause or other she had formerly not felt at ease when with Sir Nash : but that was wearing off. At any rate, a home in his well-appointed establishment would be far preferable to Dallory if its show and expense could not be kept up ; and all considerations gave way before Madam's own selfish interest.

Already Madam tasted of deposed power. Ellen Adair was to remain at the Hall, and—as Richard had emphatically enjoined—to be made welcome. Madam shut her teeth and her hands fiercely as she thought of it. Ellen Adair, whom she so hated and dreaded ! she lost herself in a speculation of what Richard might have done had she persisted in her

refusal. Would he have taken up his power in the hearing of the servants, and said I am your true master ; you must obey my decrees now, things must be according as I wish them ? Would he have said to Madam, This is my house, and you must either fall in with my wishes or—there's the door and you can walk out of it ? She had been too wise to provoke this ; and had yielded an acquiescence, tacitly at any rate, to the stay of Ellen Adair.

But as Madam sat there, thinking of this, thinking of that, a doubt slowly loomed into her mind, whether it might not, after all, be the best policy for Ellen Adair to be at the Hall. The dread that Arthur Bohun might possibly renew his wish to marry her, in spite of all that had been said and done, lay occasionally on Madam. In fact it had never left her. She could not make a child of Arthur and keep him at her apron-string ; he was free to go hither and thither at will ; and no matter in what spot of the habitable globe Ellen might be located, there was no earthly power that could stop his going to her if he wished to go. Why then, surely it *was* safer and better that the girl should be under her own eye, always in her own immediate presence.

Madam laughed a little as she rose from her musings ; she could have found in her heart to thank Richard North for bringing this about.

And so, with the morning, Madam was quite prepared to be gracious to Ellen Adair. Madam was one of those accommodating people who are ready, as we are told, to hold a candle to a certain nameless personage, if they think their interest may be served by doing it. Matilda North, who knew nothing whatever of Madam's special reasons for disliking Miss Adair—save that she had heard her mother once scornfully speak of her as a low, nameless young woman, a nobody—was coldly civil to her on Richard's introduction. But the sweet face, the gentle voice, the superior manners, won even on her ; and when the morning came Matilda felt rather glad that the present monotony of the Hall was relieved by such an inmate, and asked her all about the death of Mrs. Cumberland.

And thus Ellen Adair was located at Dallory Hall. But Mrs. North had not bargained for a cruel perplexity that was to fall upon her ere the day was over : no less than the return to it of Captain Bohun.

It has been mentioned that Sir Nash was ailing. In Madam's new scheme, undefined and incomplete though it was at present—that of possibly taking up her residence in his house—she had judged it well to inaugurate it by trying to ingratiate herself into his favour so far as she knew how. She would have liked to make herself necessary to him. Madam had heard a hint broached of his going over to certain springs in Germany, and as she knew she should never get taken with him there, though Arthur might, she just schemed a little to keep him in England. During the concluding days of her stay with him, Sir Nash had been overwhelmed with persuasions that he should come down to Dallory Hall, and get up his health there. To hear Madam talk, never had so salubrious a spot been discovered on the earth's surface as Dallory: its water was pure, its air a species of tonic in itself; for rural calmness, for simple delight, it possessed attractions never before realized save in Arcadia. Sir Nash, in answer to all this, had not given the least hope of trying its virtues; and Madam had finally departed believing that Dallory would never see him.

But on this morning, the one after Ellen Adair's arrival, Madam, amidst other letters, got one addressed to her in her son Arthur's handwriting. According to her frequent habit of late—though why she had fallen into it she could not herself have told—she let her letters lie, unlooked at, until very late in the morning; just before luncheon she opened them; Arthur's the last: she never cared to hear from *him*. And then Madam opened her eyes as well as the letter. She read that Sir Nash had come to a sudden resolution to accept her proffered hospitality for a short time, and that he and Arthur would be with her that day. Now at this very moment of reading, they were absolutely on their road to Dallory Hall.

Madam sat staring. Could she stop it, was her first thought. It was very undesirable that they should come. Ellen Adair was there; and besides, after this new and startling revelation of Richard's, Madam was not quite sure that she might continue to crowd the house with guests at will. But there was no help for it; ransack her fertile brain as she would, and did, there seemed no possible chance of preventing the travellers'

arrival. Had she known where a message would reach them, she might have telegraphed that the Hall was burning, or that yellow fever had broken out in it.

Mrs. North was not the first who has had to make the best of an unlucky combination of circumstances. She gave orders amidst her servants to prepare for the reception of the guests ; and descended to the luncheon table with a smooth face, saying there not a word. Richard was out, or she might have told him : he was so busy over the re-opening of those works of his, that he was now only at home night and morning. It happened, however, that on this day he had occasion to come home for some deed of agreement that lay in his desk.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon —a showery one—and Richard North was approaching the gates of the Hall with the long swinging step of a man of business, when he saw some one approach them more leisurely from the other side. It was Mary Dallory. He did not know she had come back ; and his face had certainly a flush of surprise on it, as he lifted his hat to greet her.

“ I got home yesterday evening,” she said,

smiling. "Forced to it. Dear old Frank wrote the most woe-begone letters imaginable, saying he could not get on without me."

"Did you come from Sir Nash Bohun's?" asked Richard.

"Sir Nash Bohun's! No. What put that in your head? I was at Sir Nash Bohun's for a few days some ages ago—weeks, at any rate, as it seems to me—but not lately. I have been with my aunt in South Audley Street."

"London must be lively at this time," remarked Richard rather sardonically; as if, like Francis Dallory, he resented her having stayed there.

"Very. It *is*, for the tourists and people have all come back to it. I suppose you'd have liked me to stay here and catch the fever. Very kind of you! I was going in to see your father."

He glanced at her with a half smile, and held out his arm after passing the gates.

"I am not sure that I shall take it. You have been very rude, Mr. Richard."

Richard dropped it at once, begging her pardon. His air was that of a man who has received a disagreeable check. But Miss

Dallory had been joking only ; she glanced up at him, and a hot flush of vexation overspread her face. Richard held it out once more, and they began talking as they went along. Some drops were beginning to fall, and he put up his umbrella.

He told her of Mrs. Cumberland's death. She had not heard of it, and expressed her sorrow. But she had had no acquaintance with Mrs. Cumberland, could not remember to have seen her more than once, and that was more than three years ago : and the subject passed.

"I hear you have begun business again," she said.

"Well—I might answer you as Green, my old time-keeper, answered me to-day. I happened to say to him, 'We have begun once more, Green :' 'Yes, in a sort, sir,' said he, gruffly. I have begun 'in a sort,' Miss Dallory."

"And what kind of 'sort' is it ?"

"In just as cautious and quiet a way as it is well possible for a poor man to begin," answered Richard. "I have no capital, as you must be aware ; or, at least, as good as none."

"I daresay you could get enough of that if

you wanted it. Some of your friends have plenty of it, Mr. Richard."

"I know that. Mrs. Gass quarrels with me every day, because I will not take hers, and run the risk of making ducks and drakes of it. No. I prefer to feel my way alone; to stand or fall by myself, Miss Dallory."

"I have heard Richard North called obstinate," remarked the young lady, looking into the damp air.

"When he believes he is right. I don't think it is a bad quality, Miss Dallory. My dear sister Bessy used to say——"

"Oh! Richard, what about her?—what of Bessy?" interrupted Mary Dallory; all ceremony thrown to the winds at the mention of the name. "I never was so painfully shocked in all my life as when I opened Frank's letter telling me she was dead. What *could* have killed her?"

"It was the fever, you know," answered Richard, sadly. "I never shall forget what I felt when I heard it. I was in Belgium."

"It seemed very strange that she should die so quickly."

"It seems strange to me still. I have not cared to talk about her since: she was my

'only sister and very dear to me. Rane says it was a most violent attack: and I suppose she succumbed to it quickly, without much struggle."

"That poor little Cissy Ketlar is gone, too."

"Yes."

"Is Ketlar one of the few men who have gone back to work?"

"Oh! dear no."

"Do you know I should like to shake those men until they come to their senses?"

The rain had ceased: but they were walking on, unconscious of it, under the umbrella. By-and-by the fact was discovered, and the umbrella put down.

"Who's this?" exclaimed Richard. "Visitors for Madam, I suppose."

Richard alluded to the sound of carriage wheels behind. He and Miss Dallory had certainly not walked as though they were winning a wager, but they were close to the house now; and reached its door simultaneously with the carriage. Richard stood in very amazement, when he saw its inmates—Arthur Bohun, thin and sallow; and Sir Nash.

There was a hasty greeting, a welcome, and then they all entered together. Madam, Matilda, and Miss Adair were in the drawing-room. Arthur came in side by side with Miss Dallory ; he was holding her hand ; they were talking together, and a slight flush illumined his thin face. Ellen, feeling shy amidst them all, remained in the back ground : she would not press forward : but a general change of position brought her and Arthur close to each other ; and she held out her hand timidly, with a rosy blush.

He turned white as death. He staggered back as though he had seen a spectre. Just for a minute he was utterly unnerved ; and then, some sort of presence of mind returning to him, he looked another way without further notice, and began talking again with Miss Dallory.

But Miss Dallory had no longer leisure to waste on him. *She* had caught sight of Ellen, whom she had never seen, and was wonderfully struck. Never in her whole life had she found a face so unutterably lovely.

““Mr. Richard”—touching his arm, as he stood by Arthur Bohun, and the young lady

had to stretch before Arthur to get to it—
“ who is that young lady ? ”

“ Ellen Adair.”

“ Is that Ellen Adair ? Oh ! what a sweet face it is ! I never saw one so lovely. Do take me to her, Mr. Richard.”

Richard introduced them. Arthur Bohun, his bosom beating with shame and pain, turned to the window : a sick faintness was stealing over him ; he was very weak yet. How he loved her !—*how* he loved her ! More ; ay, ten times more, as it seemed to him, than of yore. And yet, he must only treat her with coldness ; worse than if she and he were strangers. What untoward mystery could have brought her at Dallory Hall ? He stole away, on the plea of looking for Mr. North. Madam, who had all her eyes about her and had been using them, followed him out.

There was a hasty colloquy. He asked why Miss Adair was there, Madam replied by telling (for once in her life) the pure truth. She favoured him with a short history of the previous night’s events that had culminated in Richard’s assumption of will. The girl was there, as he saw, concluded Madam, and she could not help it.

“Did Mrs. Cumberland before she died reveal to Miss Adair what you told me about—about her father?” enquired Arthur, from between his dry and feverish and trembling lips.

“I have no means of knowing. I should think *not*, for the girl betrays no consciousness of it in her manner. Listen, Arthur,” added Madam, impressively laying her hand on his arm. “It is unfortunate that you are subjected to be in the same house with her; but I cannot, you perceive, send her from it. All you have to do is to avoid her: never allow yourself to speak to her; never be for a moment alone with her. You will be safe then.”

“Yes, it will be the only plan,” he mechanically answered, as he quitted Madam, and went on his way.

Meanwhile Ellen Adair little thought what cruelty was in store for her. Shocked though she had been the first moment by Arthur Bohun’s apparent non-recognition, it was so improbable a rudeness for *him* to be capable of, in his almost ultra-native courteousness, even to a stranger, that she soon decided he had purposely not greeted her until they

should be alone, or else had really not recognized her.

In crossing the hall an hour later, Ellen met him face to face. He was coming out of Mr. North's parlour as she was passing it. No one was about ; they were quite alone.

“Arthur,” she softly said, smiling at him and putting out her hand.

He went red and white, and hot and cold. He lifted his hat, which he happened to be wearing, having come straight in through the glass doors, and politely murmured some words that sounded like “I beg your pardon, Miss Adair :” but he did not attempt to touch her offered hand. And then he turned short round, and traversed the room back to the garden, putting on his hat again.

It seemed to her as though she had received her death-blow. There could no longer be any doubt or misapprehension after this, as to what the future was to be. Every drop of blood in her body seemed to rush to her heart and set it beating : the feeling was one akin to terror. Ellen Adair crept into the drawing-room, empty then, and leaned her aching brow against the window frame.

Presently Matilda North entered. The

young lady had her ins and outs of curiosity the same as her mother, and fancied some great sight was to be seen. She increased her speed.

“What are you looking at, Miss Adair?”

“Nothing,” answered Ellen, lifting her head. And in truth she had not been looking out at all.

“Ah! I see,” significantly spoke Miss North.

Walking slowly side by side along a distant path, went Captain Bohun and Miss Dallory. Matilda, acting on a hint from Madam, would not let slip the opportunity.

“Captain Bohun is losing no time, is he?”

“In what way?” enquired Ellen.

“Don’t you know that they are engaged? He is to marry Miss Dallory. We had all kinds of love passages, I assure you, when he was ill at my uncle’s, and she was there helping me to nurse him.”

It was a wicked and gratuitous lie: there had been no “love passages,” or semblance of them. But Ellen believed it.

“Do you say they are engaged?” she murmured.

“Of course they are. It will be a love

match too, for he is very fond of her—and she of him. I think Richard was once a little bit *gone* in that quarter; but Arthur has put him out. Sir Nash is so pleased at Arthur's choice; and mamma is delighted. They are both very fond of Mary Dallory."

And that all-but completed ceremony only a few weeks back in the church at Eastsea!—and the ring and license she held in store still!—and the deep deep love they had owned to each other, and vowed to maintain for ever—what did it all mean? Ellen Adair asked the question of herself in her agony. And as her heart returned the common-sense answer—fickleness; faithlessness—she felt as if a great sea of fire were scorching away hope and peace and happiness. The iron had entered into her soul.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE HOUSE TOGETHER.

IT was a curious position, that of some of the present inmates of Dallory Hall. Sir Nash Bohun, who went down to accompany Arthur more than anything else, and who had not intended to remain above a day or two, stayed on. The quiet life after the bustle of London was grateful to him ; the sweet country air really seemed to possess some of the salubrious properties Madam had ascribed to it. He liked to sit amidst Mr. North's flower-beds—that is to say, where the flowers had been, for it was getting too near winter for many to be seen now. He liked to watch the falling of the leaves from the dying trees ; dying until the early spring should come round and renew their vitality. Sir Nash was about to go abroad a long, long way when that genial spring-time should set in, and try the

effect of some medicinal waters, that bear the reputation of renewing failing strength. Until then, he was grateful for any change, any society that served to pass the time.

Sir Nash had been as much struck with the exceeding beauty of Ellen Adair as strangers mostly were. That she was a very sweet girl, one of those who seem made to be specially loved, he could but see. In the bustle of their first arrival, he had not noticed her: there were so many besides her to be greeted; and Miss Dallory amidst them, whose appearance was entirely unexpected and consequently a surprise. Not until they were assembling for dinner, did Sir Nash observe her. His eyes suddenly rested on a most beautiful girl in a simple black silk evening dress, its low body and sleeves edged with white tulle, and a black necklace on her pretty neck. He was wondering who she was, when he heard Richard North speak of her as Ellen Adair. Sir Nash drew Arthur Bohun to the far end of the drawing-room, ostensibly to look at one of Turner's pictures.

“Arthur, who *is* she? It cannot be *his* daughter! Adair's?”

“Yes, sir, it is.”

“Mercy be good to her!” cried Sir Nash in his compassionate dismay. “What an awful calamity! She looks entirely charming in herself; fit to mate with a prince of the blood-royal.”

“And she is so.”

“To have been born to a blighted name; an inheritance of ignominy!” continued Sir Nash. “Poor thing! poor thing! Does she know about it?”

“No, I am sure she does not,” replied Arthur warmly, his tone one of intense pain. “She believes her father to be as honourable and good as you are.”

For the very fact of Ellen’s having put out her hand to him in the hall with that bright and confiding smile, had convinced Arthur Bohun that at present she knew nothing.

It made his own position all the worse: for, to her, his behaviour must appear simply infamous. Yet, how tell her? — what excuse make? Here they were, located in the same house; and yet they could only be to each other as formal strangers. An explanation was due to Ellen Adair; but from the very nature of the subject, he could not give it. If he had possessed the slightest notion

that she was putting it down to a wrong cause—to an engagement with Miss Dallory—he would at least have set that right. But who was likely to tell him? No one. Madam and Matilda, be you very sure, would not: still less Ellen herself. And so the complication would, and must, go on; just as unhappy complications do sometimes go on. But there is this much to be said—that the setting straight the only point that might have been set straight, would not have made any difference to the breach between the two who had been hopelessly separated.

And Sir Nash Bohun never once brought himself to enter on any sort of intercourse with Ellen Adair. He would not have chosen, had he known it beforehand, to take up his sojourn under the same roof with one whose father had played so fatal a part with his long-ago-dead brother: it had been contrived by circumstances. In herself the young lady was so unobjectionable—nay, so deserving of respect and homage—that Sir Nash was won out of his projected coldness; and he would smile pleasantly upon her when paying the slight, unavoidable courtesies of every-day life. But he never lingered near her, he

never entered on prolonged conversation : a bow or two, and good morning and good night, comprised their acquaintanceship. He got to pity her ; almost to love her ; and he relieved his feelings at least once a day in private by sending sundry unorthodox epithets after the man, William Adair, for blighting the name held by this fair and sweet young lady.

It was not a very sociable party, take it on the whole. Sir Nash had a sitting-room assigned him, and stayed much in it : his grief for his son was not over, and perhaps never would be. Mr. North was often shut up in his parlour, or walking with bent head amid the garden paths. Madam kept greatly aloof, nobody knew where ; Matilda was buried in her novels, French and English, or chattering somewhere above to Madam's French maid. Richard was at the works all day. Ellen Adair, feeling herself a kind of interloper, stayed in her chamber, or went to remote parts of the garden and sat there in solitude. As to Arthur Bohun, he was an invalid still, weak and ill, and would often not be seen until luncheon or dinner time. There was a general meeting at meals, and a sociable evening after it.

Madam had not allowed matters to take their course without a prompting word from herself. On the day after Sir Nash and Arthur arrived, she came, all smiles and suavity, knocking at the door of Ellen's chamber. She found that young lady weeping bitter tears—who stammered out, as she wiped them away and strove for composure, some excuse about feeling so greatly the sudden death of Mrs. Cumberland. Madam was gracious, considerate ; as she could be when she pleased : she poured some scent on her own white handkerchief, and held it to Miss Adair's nose. Ellen thanked her, and gave it back again, and smoothed her hair back with her hand, and dried her tears, and rose up out of the emotion as a thing of the past.

“I am sorry it should have happened that Sir Nash chose this time to come,” spoke Madam ; “you might just now have preferred to be alone with us. Captain Bohun is still so very unwell that Sir Nash says he could but bring him.”

“Yes,” mechanically replied Ellen, really not knowing what part it was she assented to.

“And Arthur—of course he was anxious to come ; he knew Mary Dallory would be

back," went on Madam, with candour, like a woman without guile. "We are all delighted at the prospect of his marrying her. Before he was heir to the baronetcy it of course did not so much matter how he married, provided it were a gentlewoman of family fit to consort with the Bohuns. But now that he has come into the succession through poor James's death, things have changed. Did you know that Sir Nash has cut off the entail?" abruptly broke off Madam.

Ellen thought she did. The fact was, Arthur had told Mrs. Cumberland of it at Eastsea: but Ellen did not understand much about entails, so the matter had passed from her mind.

"The cutting off the entail has placed Arthur entirely in his uncle's hands," continued Madam. "If Arthur were to offend him, Sir Nash might not leave him a ten-shilling piece. It is fortunate for all of us that Mary Dallory is so charming: Sir Nash is almost as fond of her as is Arthur. And she is a great heiress, you know: she must have at the very least three or four thousand a year. Some people say it's more; the minority of the Dallory children was so long."

"It is a great deal," murmured Ellen.

"Yes. But it will be very acceptable. I'm sure, by the way affairs seem to be going on with Mr. North and Richard, it looks as though Arthur would have us all on his hands. It has been a *great* happiness to us, his choosing Miss Dallory for his wife. I don't believe he thought much of her before his illness. She was staying with us in town during that time, and so—and so the love grew, and Arthur made up his mind. He had the good sense to see the responsibility that James Bohun's death left on him, to make a suitable and proper choice."

Ellen had learnt a lesson lately in self-control, and maintained her calmness now. She did not know Madam (except by reputation) quite as well as some people did, and was taken-in to believe she spoke in all sincerity. One thing she could not decide—whether Madam had known of the projected marriage at Eastsea, or not. She felt inclined to fancy that she had not, and Ellen hoped it with all her whole heart. Madam lingered on yet to say a few more words. She drew an affecting picture of the solace, the joy, the consolation this projected union of her son

with Mary Dallory brought to her, his mother ; and—as if she were addressing an imaginary audience in the ceiling—turned up her eyes and clasped her hands, and declared she must put it to the honour and good feeling of the world in general never to attempt anything by word or deed, that might tend to mar this blessed state of things. With that she kissed Ellen Adair, and said, now that she had apologised for their not being quite alone at the Hall and explained how it happened that Sir Nash came, she would leave her to dress.

As the days went on, something happened to intensify the state of affairs—or, at least, to strengthen Ellen's view of them—Mary Dallory came on a visit to the Hall. Her brother Francis went away from home to join a shooting party, and Madam seized upon the occasion to invite his sister. She came, seemingly nothing loth ; and with her a great trunkful of paraphernalia. Matilda North had once said, when calling Mary Dallory a flirt, that she'd come fast enough to the Hall when Richard and Arthur were there. Any way, she came now. After this, Arthur Bohun would be more down stairs than he was before ; and he and she would be often

together in the grounds ; sitting on benches under the evergreens or strolling along the walks side by side. Sometimes Arthur would take her arm with an invalid's privilege ; his limp at the present time was more perceptible than it ever had been : and sometimes she would take his. They seemed to be always talking, their heads close together after the manner of those who hold confidential intercourse. Ellen Adair would watch them through this window, through that window, and press her trembling fingers on her aching heart. She saw it all : or thought she did. Arthur Bohun had found that his future prospects in life, his heirship in fact, depended upon his wedding Miss Dallory, or some one equally eligible ; and so he had resolved to forget the sweet romance of the past, and embrace reality.

She thought he might have spoken to her. So much was certainly due to her ; to her who had all but been made his wife. His present treatment of her was simply despicable ; next door to wicked. Better that he had explained only as Madam did : what was there to hinder his telling her the truth ? He might have said to her, ever so briefly :

“Such and such things have arisen, and my former plans are frustrated, and I cannot help myself.” But no ; all he did was to avoid her : he never sought to touch her hand ; his eyes never met hers if he could guard against it. It was exactly as though he had grown to despise her, and sought to show it. *Had* he ? When Ellen’s fears suggested the question—and it was in her mind pretty often now—she would turn sick with despair, and wish to die.

The truth was this. Arthur Bohun’s fears lest he should betray his still ardent love, caused him to be more studiously cold to Ellen than he need have been. A strange yearning would come over him to clasp her to his heart and sob out his grief and tenderness : and the very fear lest he might really do this some day, lest passion and nature should become too strong for prudence and conventionality, made him shun her and seem to behave, as Ellen thought it, despicably. He knew it himself ; he called himself far more despicable than Ellen could call him ; a coward, a knave, a miserably-dishonoured man. And so, that’s the way things went on at Dallory Hall ; and were likely to go on.

One afternoon, a few days after Mrs. Cumberland was interred, Ellen went out to see her grave. Madam, Miss Dallory, Matilda, and Sir Nash had gone out driving: Arthur had been away somewhere since the morning, Mr. North was over the celery bed with his head gardener. There was only Ellen: she was alone and lonely, and she put her black things on and walked through Dallory to the churchyard. It happened that she met three or four people she knew; and she stayed to talk with them. Mrs. Gass was one; the widow of Henry Hepburn was another. But she got on at last, feeling a little shy at being seen abroad alone: in walking so far as Dallory Mrs. Cumberland had always caused a servant to attend her.

The grave had been made not far from Bessy Rane's. Ellen had no difficulty in distinguishing the one from the other, though as yet there was not a stone to mark either. Mrs. Cumberland's was near that of the late Thomas Gass: Bessy's was close to Edmund North's. A great winter tree, an evergreen, overshadowed this corner of the churchyard and she sat down on the bench that went round its trunk. Bessy's grave was almost at her feet; two yards, or so, away.

She leaned her face on her hand, and was still. The past, the present, the future ; Mrs. Cumberland, Bessy Rane, Edmund North ; her own bitter trouble, and other things—all seemed to be struggling together tumultuously in her brain. But, as she sat on, the tumult cleared itself a little, and she lost herself in imaginative thoughts of that heaven where pain and care shall be no more. Could they see her ? Could Mrs. Cumberland look down and see her, Ellen Adair, sitting there in her sorrow ? A fanciful idea came to her that perhaps the dead were the guardian angels appointed to watch the living : to be “in charge over them to keep them in all their ways.” If so, why then who was watching *her* ?—it must be her own mother, Mary Adair. Could these guardian angels pray for them ?—intercede with the mighty God and the Saviour that their sins here might be blotted out ? How long Ellen gave to these thoughts she never knew ; but she wound up with crying softly to herself, and she wondered how long it would be before she joined them all in heaven.

Somebody, approaching from the back of the tree, came round with a slow step and

sat down on the bench. It was a gentleman in black, she could see that much, though he was nearly on the other side of the tree's trunk, and so had his back to her. Ellen found she had not been observed, and prepared to leave. It had grown dusk in the twilight of the dull evening. As she stooped to pick up her handkerchief, which had fallen, the gentleman turned and saw her. Saw as well the tears on her face. It was Captain Bohun.

He got up quicker than he had sat down, intending no doubt to move away. But in his haste he dropped his stick—a great thick stick that he used for support in walking since his illness—and it fell across Ellen's feet. She stooped in some confused impulse to pick it up, and so did he.

“Thank you—I beg your pardon,” he said with an air of self-humiliation so great that it might have wrung a tender heart to see. And then he felt that he could not for very shame go off without some notice, as he had been thinking to do. Though why he stayed to speak and what he said, it might have puzzled him at the moment to tell. Instinct, more than reason, prompted the words.

“She was taken off very suddenly.”

Standing close, though he was, to Bessy’s grave, Ellen thought he looked across at Mrs. Cumberland’s. And the latter had been latest in her thoughts.

“Yes. I feared we should not get her home. And I feel sure that the journey was fatal to her: that, if she had remained still, she would not have died quite so soon.”

“It was of Bessy I spoke.”

“Oh—I thought you meant Mrs. Cumberland. Mrs. Cumberland’s death has made so much difference to me, that—that—I suppose my mind runs on her. This is the first time I have been here.”

Both of them were agitated to pain: both could fain have pressed their hearts tightly to still the frightful beating there.

“Ellen, I should like to say a word to you,” he suddenly exclaimed, turning his face to her for a moment, and then turning it aside again. “I am aware that nothing can excuse the deep shame of my conduct in not having attempted any explanation. To you I cannot attempt it. I should have given it to Mrs. Cumberland if she had not died.”

Ellen made no answer. Her handkerchief

lay in her hand, and she looked down upon it.

“ The subject was so intensely painful and —and awkward—that at first I did not think I could have mentioned it even to Mrs. Cumberland. Then came my illness. After that, while I lay day after day, left to my own reflections, things began to present themselves to me in rather a different light; and I saw that to maintain my silence would be the most wretched shame of all. I resolved to disclose everything to Mrs. Cumberland, and leave her to repeat it to you if she thought fit—at least, as much of it as would give you the clue to the cause of my strange and apparently unjustifiable conduct.”

Ellen’s fingers were pulling at the hem of her handkerchief, this way and that. She did not speak.

“ Mrs. Cumberland’s death, I say, prevented this,” continued Captain Bohun, who had gathered somewhat of courage now the matter was opened, and stood fully turned to her, leaning both hands on his stick: “ and I have felt since in a frightful dilemma, from which I see no escape. To you I cannot enter on an explanation: nor yet am I able to tell you

why I cannot. The subject is altogether so very painful——”

Ellen lifted her head suddenly to speak. Every drop of blood had deserted her face, leaving it of an ashy whiteness. The movement caused him to pause.

“ I know what it is,” she managed to say from between her white and trembling lips.

“ You—know it ??”

“ Yes. All.”

Alas for the misapprehensions of this world. *He* was thinking only of the strange disclosure made to him concerning Mr. Adair; *she* only of his engagement to Miss Dallory. At her avowal all kinds of thoughts came surging through his brain. All! She knew it *all*!

“ Have you known it long ??” he questioned in a low tone.

“ The time may be counted by days.”

He jumped to the conclusion that Mrs. Cumberland had disclosed it to her on her death-bed. And Ellen’s knowledge of it bettered his position just a little. But, looking at her, at her pale sweet face and down-cast eyes, at the anguish pervading every line of her countenance, and which she could not hide, Arthur Bohun’s heart was filled to over-

flowing with a strange pity, that seemed to wring it to breaking. He drew nearer to her.

“Thank God that you understand, Ellen—that at least you do not think me the shameless scoundrel I must otherwise have appeared,” he whispered, his voice trembling with its deep emotion. “I cannot help myself: you must see that I cannot, as you know all. The blow nearly killed me. My fate—our fate, if I may dare still so far to couple your name with mine—is a very bitter one.”

Ellen had begun to shiver inwardly. Something in his words grated terribly on her ear: and pride enabled her to keep down outward emotion.

“You left the ring and license with me,” she abruptly said, in perhaps an access of bitterness of temper. “What am I to do with them?”

“Burn them—destroy them,” he fiercely replied. “They are worthless to us now.”

But he so spoke only in his anguish. Ellen interpreted it differently.

“God help us both, Ellen! A cruel, wicked fate has parted us for this world: but we may be permitted to be together in the next. It is all my hope now.”

Should she be able to keep down the emotion and the bitter grief? It was shaking and trying her.

“Heaven bless you and take care of you, Ellen! Our paths in life must lie apart, but I pray always that yours may be a happy one.”

Without further word, without touching her hand, thus he went. Limping on to the broad path, and thence down it towards the gate of the churchyard.

There are moments into which a whole lifetime of agony seems to be compressed. Such a one was this for Ellen Adair. Dusk was coming on now rapidly, but she sat on, her head bent low on her hands. They were, then, separated for ever; there was no further hope for her!—he himself had confirmed it. She wondered whether the pain would kill her; whether she should be able to battle with it, or must die of the humiliation it brought. The pain and the humiliation were strong and sharp now—now as she sat. By-and-bye there stole again into her mind those thoughts which Captain Bohun’s appearance had interrupted—the heavenly place of rest to which Bessy and Mrs. Cumberland had

passed. Insensibly it soothed her: and imagination went roving away unchecked. She seemed to see the white robes of the Redeemed; she saw the golden harps in their hands, and the soft sweet light around them, and the love and peace. The thoughts served to show her how poor and worthless, as compared with the joys of that Better Land, were the trials and pains of this world: how short a moment, even at the longest, they had to be endured; how quickly and surely all here must pass away! Yes, she might endure with patience for the time! And when she lifted her head, it was to break into a flood of violent and yet soothing tears, that she could not have shed before.

“ Father in Heaven, Thou seest all my trouble and my agony. I have no one in the world to turn to for shelter—and the blast is strong. Vouchsafe to guide and cover me!”

But it was close upon night. With a wet handkerchief and eyes still streaming, she rose to make her way out of the churchyard. In a sheltered nook that she passed, sat a man: and Ellen started a little, and quickened her pace. It was Captain Bohun. Instead of going away, he had turned back to

wait. She understood it at once : at that hour he would not leave her alone in the grave-yard. He wished to be chivalrous to her still, for all his bare-faced faithlessness. In the very teeth of his avowed desertion of her, his words and manner had proved that he loved her yet. Loved *her*, and not another. It brought its own comfort to Ellen Adair. Of course it ought not, but it did : for the human heart at best is frail and faulty.

Captain Bohun followed her out of the churchyard, and kept her in sight all the way home, every fibre of feeling he possessed aching for her. He had seen the signs and traces of her fit of weeping ; he knew what must be the amount of her anguish. He might have been ready to shoot himself could it have restored peace to her ; he felt that he should very much like to shoot Mr. Adair, whose bad deeds had entailed this misery upon them.

At the Hall-gates he was overtaken by Richard, striding home in haste to dinner. Richard, passing his arm through Arthur's, began telling him that he feared he was going to have some sharpish trouble with his ex-workmen.

And as they, the once fond lovers, sat together afterwards at table, and in the lighted drawing-room, Arthur as far from her, according to custom, as he could get, none present suspected, or could suspect, the scene that had taken place in the churchyard. Ellen Adair's eyes looked heavy; but that was nothing unusual now. It was known that she grieved for Mrs. Cumberland.

CHAPTER IV.

JELLY'S TWO EVENING VISITS.

JELLY—to whom we are obliged to refer rather frequently, as she holds some important threads of the story in her hands—found times went very hard with her. A death within the house in addition to the death close without it, were almost more than Jelly could well do with in her present state of mind. The very peculiar and startling circumstances that had characterized Mrs. Rane's demise did not attend Mrs. Cumberland's: but it had been very sudden at last, and Jelly was sincerely attached to her mistress.

Dr. Rane was left sole executor to his mother's will. It was a very simple one: she bequeathed him all she had. That was not much; for a portion of her income died with her. He found that he had two hundred a

year—as he had known all along he should have—and her household furniture. Of ready money there was little. When he should have discharged trifling claims and paid the funeral expenses, some twenty or thirty pounds would remain over, and that was all.

Dr. Rane acted promptly. He discharged two of the servants, Ann and Dinah, retaining Jelly for the present to look after the house. He wished, if he could, to get the furniture taken-to with the house, for he knew how ruinous in general is a sale to the pocket ; so he advertised it in the local papers. He had been advertising his practice—I think this has been said previously—but nothing satisfactory had come of it. Inquiries had been made, but they all dropped through. Perhaps Dr. Rane was too honest to say his practice was worth much, or to conceal the fact that Mr. Seeley had the best of it in Dallory. Neither was the tontine money as yet paid over ; and, putting out of consideration all other business, the doctor must have waited for that.

Now, of all things that could have happened, Jelly most disliked and dreaded the being left to herself in the house. From hav-

ing been as physically bold as a woman can be, she had latterly become one of the most timid. She started at her own shadow ; she would not for the world have gone alone at night into the room where Mrs. Cumberland died. A shivering kind of fear lay on her constantly. Having seen one ghost, Jelly could not feel sure that she should not see two. Some people hold a theory that there is given to a very few persons in this world—and not to others—the faculty, or gift, or whatever you may please to call it, of discerning supernatural sights and things pertaining to the other world. Jelly had heard this : and she took up the notion that for some wise purpose she had been suddenly endowed with it. To stay in the house alone was more than her brain would bear ; and she seized upon Ketlar's eldest girl, a starved damsel of thirteen, called at home "Riah," to come and be with her. As it was a mouth less to feed, and they had tried to get Riah a place in vain—for the failure of trade affected all classes, and less servants seemed to be wanted everywhere—Ketlar and his wife were very glad to let her go.

How do rumours get about ? Can any-

body tell ? How did a certain rumour get about and begin to be whispered in Dallory ? Certainly no one there could have told. Jelly could have been upon her Bible oath if necessary (or thought she could) that she had not sent it floating. It was a very ugly one, whoever had done it.

Late one afternoon Jelly received a call from Mrs. Gass's smart housemaid. The girl brought a message from her mistress ; Mrs. Gass wanted very particularly to see Jelly, and had sent to say that Jelly was to go there as soon as she could. Jelly made no sort of objection. She had been confined to the house much more closely of late than she approved of : partly because Dr. Rane had charged her to be in the way in case people called to look over it ; partly because she had found out that Miss Riah had a tendency to walk off, herself, if she could get Jelly's back turned.

“Now mind you sit still in the kitchen and attend to the fire, and listen to the door ; and perhaps I'll bring you home a pair of strings for that bonnet of yours,” said Jelly to the girl, when she was ready to start. “The doctor will be in by-and-by, so don't you attempt to get out of the way.”

With these injunctions, Jelly began her walk. She had on her best new mourning—a merino gown of fine texture and fringed shawl of the same—and was in a complaisant mood. It looked inclined to rain—the weather had been uncertain of late—but Jelly had her umbrella: a silk one that had belonged to her mistress, and that Dr. Rane had given, with many other things, to Jelly. She rather wondered what Mrs. Gass wanted with her, but supposed it was to tell her of a situation. It had been arranged that if an eligible one offered, Jelly should be at liberty to go, and a woman be placed in the house to take care of it. Mrs. Gass had said she would let Jelly know if she heard of anything desirable. So away went Jelly with a fleet foot, little thinking what there was in store for her at her walk's end.

Mrs. Gass, wearing mourning also, was in her usual sitting-room, the dining-parlour. As Jelly entered, the smart maid was carrying out the tea-tray. Mrs. Gass stirred up her fire, and bade Jelly to a chair near it, drawing her own pretty close to her.

“Just see whether that girl have shut the door fast afore I begin,” suggested Mrs. Gass.

“It won’t do to have ears a-listening to me.”

Jelly went, saw that the door was closed, came back and sat down again. She noticed that Mrs. Gass looked keenly in her face, as if studying it, before speaking.

“Jelly, what is it that you’ve been a-saying about Dr. Rane?”

The question was so unexpected that Jelly did not immediately answer it. Quite a change, this, from an offer of a nice place.

“I’ve said nothing,” she replied.

“Now don’t you repeat that to me. You have. And it would have been a’most as well for you that you had cut your tongue out afore doing it.”

“I said—what I did—to you, Mrs. Gass. To nobody else.”

“Look here, girl—the mischief’s done, and you’d a great deal better be looking it full in the face than denying of it. There’s reports getting up about Dr. Rane, in regard to his wife’s death, and no mortal woman or man can have set ‘em afloat but *you*. This morning I was in North Inlet, looking a bit after them scamps of workmen that won’t work, and won’t let others work if they can help it: and after

I had gave a taste of my mind to as many of 'em as was standing about, I stepped in to Mother Green's. She has the rheumatics—and he has got a touch of 'em. Talking with her of one thing and another, we got on to the subject of Dr. Rane and the tontine ; and she said two or three words that frightened me; that frightened me, Jelly; for they pointed to the suspicion that the doctor had sacrificed his wife to get it. I pretended to understand nothing—she didn't speak out broad enough for me to take it up and answer her—and it was the best plan *not* to understand——”

“ For an old woman, Mother Green has got the longest tongue I know,” interrupted Jelly.

“ You've got a longer,” retorted Mrs. Gass. “ Just wait till I've finished, girl. 'Twas a tolerable fine morning, and after that I went walking on, and struck off down by the Wheatsheaf. Packerton's wife was a-standing at the door with cherry ribbons in her cap, and I stopped to talk to her. *She* brought up Dr. Rane ; and lowered her voice as she did it as if it was high treason ; asking me if I'd heard what was being said about his wife's not having died a natural death. I did give

it the woman ; and I think I frightened her. She acknowledged that she only spoke from a hint dropped by Timothy Wilks, and said she had thought at the time it couldn't have anything in it. But what *I* have got to say to you is this," continued Mrs. Gass to Jelly more emphatically : " whether it's Tim Wilks that's spreading the report, or whether it's Mother Green, they've both got it in the first place from you."

Jelly sat in discomfort. She did not like this. It is nothing to be charged with a fault when you are wholly innocent ; but when conscience says you are partly guilty it is another thing. Jelly was aware that one night at Mother Green's, taking supper with that old matron and Timothy, she had so far yielded to the seductions of social gossip as to forget her usual reticence ; and had said rather more than she ought. Still, at the worst, it had been but a word or two : a hint, but not a specific charge.

" I may have let fall an incautious word there," confessed Jelly. " But it was nothing anybody can take hold of."

" Don't you make sure of that," reprimanded Mrs. Gass. " We are told in the

sacred writings—which it's not well to mention in ordinary talk, and I'd only do it with reverence—of a grain of mustard seed, that's the least of all seeds when it's sown, and grows into the greatest tree. You remember Who it is says that, Jelly, so it's not for me to enlarge upon it. But I may say this much, girl, that that's an apt exemplification of gossip. You drop one word, or maybe only half a one : and it goes spreading out pretty nigh over the world."

" I'm sure what with the weight and worry this dreadful secret has been on my mind, a'most driving me mad, the wonder is that I've been able to keep as silent as I have," put in Jelly, who was getting cross. Mrs. Gass resumed.

" If the thing is what you think it to be—a dreadful secret ; and it is brought to light through you, why I don't know that you'd get blamed—though there's many a one will say you might have spared your mistress's son and left it for others to charge him. But suppose it turns out to be no dreadful secret ; suppose poor Bessy Rane died a natural death in the fever, what then ?—where would you be ?"

Jelly took off her black gloves as if they

had grown suddenly tight for her hands. She said nothing.

“Look here, girl. My belief is that you’ve just set a brand on fire! one that won’t be put out until it’s burnt out. My firm belief also is, *that you be altogether mistaken*. I have thought the matter over with myself hour after hour; and, except at the first moment when you whispered it to me in the churchyard, and I own I was startled, I have never been able to bring my common sense to believe in it. Oliver Rane loved his wife too well to hurt a hair of her head.”

“There was that anonymous letter,” cried Jelly.

“Whatever hand he might have had in that enonymous letter,—and nobody knows the truth on’t, whether he had or whether he hadn’t—I don’t believe he was the man to hurt a hair of his wife’s head,” repeated Mrs. Gass. “And for you to be spreading it about that he murdered her!”

“The circumstances all point to it,” said Jelly.

“They don’t.”

“Why, Mrs. Gass, they do.”

“Let’s go over ‘em, and see,” said Mrs.

Gass, who had a plain way of convincing people. "Let's begin at the beginning. Hear me tell 'em."

She went over the past minutely. Jelly listened, growing more uncomfortable with every moment. There was absolutely not one fact inconsistent with natural death. It is true the demise had been speedy, but the cause assigned for it, exhaustion, might have been the real one; and the hasty fastening down of the coffin was no doubt a simple measure of precaution, taken out of regard to the welfare of the living. No; as Mrs. Gass put it in her straightforward, sensible way, there was positively not a single fact that could be urged for supposing Mrs. Rane came to an untimely end. Jelly twirled her gloves, and twisted her hands, and grew hot—not with the fire.

"There was what I saw—the ghost," she said.

But Mrs. Gass ridiculed the ghost—that is, the idea of it—beyond every earthly thing. Jelly, however, would not give way there; and they had some sparring.

"Ghost, indeed! and you come to this age! It was the beer, girl; the beer."

"I hadn't had a drop of beer," protested Jelly, almost crying. "How was I to get beer at Ketlar's? They've got none for themselves. I had had nothing inside my lips but tea."

"Well; beer or no beer, ghost or no ghost, it strikes me, Jelly, that you have done a pretty thing. This bad story is as sure to get wind now as them geraniums of mine will get air when I open the window to-morrow morning. You'll be called upon to substantiate your story; and when you can't—and I'm sure you know that you can't—the law may have you up to answer for it. I once knew a man that rose a bad charge against another; he was tried for it, and got seven years' transportation. You may come to the same."

A very agreeable prospect! If Jelly's bonnet had not been on, her hair might have gone up on end with horror. There could be no doubt that it was she who had started the report; and in this moment of repentance she sat really wishing she had first cut her foolish tongue out.

"Nothing can be done now," concluded Mrs. Gass. "There's just one chance for you—that the rumour may die away. If it will,

let it ; and take warning to be more cautious in future. The probability is that Mother Green and Tim Wilks have mentioned it to others besides me and Packerton's wife ; if so, nothing will keep it under. You have been a great fool, Jelly."

Jelly went away in mortal fright. Mrs. Gass had laid the matter before her in its true light. Suspect as she might, *she had no proof* ; and if questioned by authority could not have deduced one.

" Dr. Rane have been in here three times after you," was young Riah's salutation when Jelly got home.

" Dr. Rane has ?"

" And he said the last time you oughtn't to be away from the house so long with only me in it," added the damsel, who felt aggrieved, on her own score, at being left.

" Oh did he !" carelessly returned Jelly.

But she began considering *what* Dr. Rane could want. For her parting charge to Riah, that Dr. Rane was coming in, had been a slight invention of her own, meant to help keep that young person to her duty. Just as she had decided that it might have reference to this same report, which he might

have heard, and Jelly was growing more and more ill at ease in consequence, he came in. She went to him in the dining-room.

“Jelly,” said the doctor, “I think I have let the house.”

“Have you, sir?” returned Jelly, blithely, in the agreeable revulsion of feeling. “I’m sure I am glad.”

“But only for a short while,” continued Dr. Rane. “Two ladies of Whitborough are seeking for temporary change of air, and will take it if it suits them. They are coming to-morrow to look at it.”

“Very well, sir.”

“They will occupy the house for a month certain, and perhaps continue in it longer. They pay liberally, and it will give me time to let it for a permanency. If you feel inclined to take service with them, I believe there’ll be room.”

“Who are they?” asked Jelly.

“Mrs. and Miss Beverage. Quakers.”

She knew the name. Very respectable people; plenty of money.

“You’ll show them over it to-morrow when they come: I may, or may not, be in the way at the time,” concluded Dr. Rane.

Jelly attended him to the door. It was evident he had not heard the rumour that had reached Mrs. Gass ; or, at least, did not connect Jelly with it. But, how was he likely to hear it ? The probability was, that all Dallory would be making a ball of it before it got near *him*.

Jelly could not eat her supper. She had taken too nauseous a dose of medicine at Mrs. Gass's to leave room for appetite. Neither did she get any sleep. Tossing and turning on her bed, lay she : the past doubt and the present dread troubling her brain until morning light.

But, when Jelly had thus tormented herself and regarded the matter in all its aspects, the result was, that she still believed her own version of the tale—namely, that Mrs. Rane had not come fairly by her death. True, it was, that she had no proof to offer in corroboration : but she began wondering whether such proof might not be found. At any rate, she resolved to search for it. Not openly ; not to make use of ; but quietly and cautiously : to hold in her hand, as it were, in case of need. She could not tell how to look for this, or where to begin. No one had seen

Mrs. Rane after death—except of course the undertakers. Jelly resolved to question them: perhaps something might be gleaned.

It was afternoon before the expected ladies came. Two nice-speaking women, dressed after the sober fashion of their sect. Mrs. Beverage, a widow, was sixty; her daughter nearly forty. They liked the house, and said they should take it; and they liked Jelly, and engaged her to stay as upper maid, intending to bring two servants of their own. After their departure, Jelly had to wait for Dr. Rane: it would not do for him to find only Riah again. He came in while Jelly was at tea. She told him the ladies wished to enter as soon as convenient: and the doctor said he would at once go over to see them at Whitborough.

This left Jelly free. It was getting late when she set forth on her expedition, and she startled at the hedge shadows as she went along. The mind is swayed by its thoughts present; and Jelly's were of all kinds of uncanny and unpleasant things. Jelly's disposition was not a secretive one, rather the contrary, and she hated to have to do with

what might not be discussed in the broad light of day.

The commencement of her task was at any rate not difficult : she could enter the Hepburns' house without excuse or apology, knowing them sufficiently well for it. When they were young, Thomas Hepburn, his wife, and Jelly had all gone to the same day-school, and been companions. Walking through the shop without ceremony, save a nod to young Charley, who was minding it, Jelly turned into the little parlour ; a narrow room with the fire-place in the corner surmounted by an old-fashioned high wainscot of wood, painted stone-colour. Thomas Hepburn, who seemed to be always ailing with something or other, had got a patch of inflammation on his left arm, and his wife was binding bruised lily leaves round it. Jelly, drawing near to look on, at once expressed her disapprobation of the treatment, saying the leaves would only "draw."

"I can't think how it should have come, or what it is," he observed. "I don't remember to have hurt it in any way."

Jelly took the seat on the other side the fire-place, and Mrs. Hepburn, a stout healthy

woman, sat down to the small round table and began working by lamplight. Thomas Hepburn, nursing his arm, which pained him, led all unconsciously to the subject Jelly had come to speak upon. Saying that if his arm was not better in the morning, he should show it to Dr. Rane, he thence went on to express his sorrow that the doctor should talk of leaving Dallory, for they liked him so much both as a gentleman and a doctor.

“But after such a loss as he has experienced in his wife, poor lady, no wonder the place is distasteful to him,” went on Hepburn. And Jelly felt silently obliged for the words that helped her.

“Ah, that was a dreadful thing,” she observed. “I shall never forget the morning I heard of it, and the shock it gave me.”

“I’m sure I can never forget the night he came down here, and said she was dead,” rejoined the undertaker. “It was like a blow. Although I was in a degree prepared for it, for the doctor had told me in the afternoon what a dangerous state she was in—and I didn’t like his manner when he spoke: it seemed to say more than his words. I came home and told Martha here that I feared it

was all over with Mrs. Rane. Poor Henry was lying dead at the same time."

"And the answer I made to Thomas was, that she'd get over it," said Mrs. Hepburn, looking up from her sewing at Jelly. "I thought she would: Bessy North was always hearty and healthy. You might have taken a lease of her life."

"We had shut up the shops for the night, though the men were at work still next door, when the doctor came," resumed Thomas Hepburn, as if he found some satisfaction in recalling the circumstances for Jelly's benefit. "It was past eleven o'clock: but we had to work late during that sad time; and Henry's illness and death seemed to make a difference of nearly as much as two hands to us. I was in the yard with the men when there came a knocking at the shop door: I went to open it, and there stood the doctor. 'Hepburn,' said he, 'my poor wife is gone.' Well, I did feel it."

Jelly gave a groan by way of expressing her sympathy. She was inwardly deliberating how she could best lead on to what she wanted to ask. But she never was at fault long.

“I have heard you express distaste against some of the things that go to make up your trade, Thomas Hepburn, but at least they give you the opportunity of taking last looks at people—which we don’t get,” began Jelly. “I’d have given I don’t know how much out of my pocket to have had a farewell look at Mrs. Rane.”

“That doesn’t always bring pleasure to the feelings—or to the sight either,” was the answer of the undertaker.

“Did you go to her?” asked Jelly.

“No. I sent the two men: Clark and Dobson. They took the coffin at once: the doctor had brought the measure.”

“And they screwed her down at once,” retorted Jelly, with more expressive quickness than she had meant to use.

“Ay! It was best. We did it in some other cases that died of the same.”

“Did the men notice how she looked—whether there was much change?” resumed Jelly, in a low tone. “Some faces are very sweet and placid after death: so much so that one can’t help thinking they are happy. Was Mrs. Rane’s?”

“The men didn’t see her,” said Hepburn.

"Not see her!"

"No. The doctor managed that they should not. It was very kind of him. Dobson he'd had an awful dread all along of catching the fever; and Clark was beginning to fear it a little: Dr. Rane knew this, and said he'd not expose them to the risk more than could be helped. The men carried the coffin up to the ante-room, and he said he would manage to do all the rest."

Jelly sat with open mouth and eyes staring. The undertaker put it down to surprise.

"Medical men are used to these things, Jelly. It comes as natural to them as to us. Dr. Rane said to Clark that he would call over Seeley if he found he wanted help. I don't suppose he would want it: she was small and light, poor young lady."

Jelly found her tongue. "Then they—Clark and Dobson—never saw her at all!"

"Not at all. She was in the far room. The door was close shut, and well covered besides with a sheet wet with disinfecting fluid. There was no danger, Dr. Rane assured them, so long as they did not go into the room where she lay. The men came away wishing other people would take these precautions:

but then, you see, doctors understand things. He gave them each a glass of brandy-and-water too."

"And—then—*nobody* saw her!" persisted Jelly, as if she could not get over the fact.

"I daresay not," replied Thomas Hepburn.

"He must have hammered her down himself!" nearly shrieked Jelly.

"He could do it as well as the men could. They left the nails and hammer."

"Well—it—it—seems dreadful work for a man to have to do for his wife," observed Jelly after a pause, staring over Mr. Hepburn's head into vacancy, as if she were mentally watching the hammering.

"He did violence to his own feelings out of consideration for the men," said the undertaker. "And I must say it was very good of him. But, as I've observed, doctors know what's what, and how necessary it is to keep away from danger in perilous times."

"Did he manage the one of lead as well as the first? 'twould be heavy for him, wouldn't it?" continued Jelly in a hard kind of tone, which she found it utterly impossible to suppress. "And there was the third one to come, after that."

"I went and soldered down the lead myself. The men took up the last one and made all ready."

"Yes!" thought Jelly. "As soon as her poor dear face was safely nailed in, so that it couldn't tell tales, he might let anybody, that would, do the rest."

"Were you not afraid of the risk, Thomas Hepburn?" asked Jelly, somewhat tauntingly, for she despised the man for being so simply unsuspecting. "Soldering takes up some time, don't it?"

"The rooms had been well disinfected then, the doctor said. We took no harm."

That Thomas Hepburn held the most perfect faith in Dr. Rane, and never had discerned cause for the smallest suspicion of unfair play, was self-evident. Jelly, in her superior knowledge, in her wrath altogether, could have shaken him for it. In his place she felt mentally sure she should not have been so obtuse. Jelly forgot that it was only that knowledge of hers that enabled her to see what others did not: and that while matters, looked at from Hepburn's point of view, were all right; looked at from hers, with a clue in her head, they were all wrong.

"Well, I must be wishing you good evening, I suppose," she said. "I've left only that Riah in the house—and she's of no mortal good to anybody, except for company. With people dying about one like this, one gets to feel dull, all alone."

"So one does," answered the undertaker. "Don't go yet."

Jelly had not risen. She sat looking at the fire, evidently in deep thought. Presently she turned her keen eyes on the man.

"Thomas Hepburn, did you ever see a ghost?"

He took the question as calmly and seriously as though she had said Did you ever see a funeral. And shook his head slightly in dissent.

"I can't say I ever saw one myself. I've known those that have. That is, that say and believe they have. And I'm sure I've no reason to say they've not. One hears curious tales now and then."

"They are not pleasant things to see," remarked Jelly a little dreamily.

"Well, no ; I daresay not."

"For my part, I don't put faith in ghosts," said hearty Mrs. Hepburn, looking up with

a laugh. "None will ever come near me, I'll answer for it. I've too many children about me, and too much work to do, for pastime of that sort. Ghosts come from nothing but nervous fancies."

Jelly could not contradict this in the positive manner she would have liked, so it was best to say nothing. She finally got up to go—that Riah would be falling asleep with her hair in the candle.

And in spite of the prospective attractions of a supper of toasted cheese and ale, which she was pressed to stay and partake of, Jelly departed. Things had become as sure and clear to her as daylight.

"I don't so much care now if it does come out," she said to herself as she hastened along. "What Thomas Hepburn can tell as good as proves the doctor's guilt. I knew it was so. And I wish that old Dame Gass had been smothered before she sent me into that doubt and fright last night!"

But the road seemed frightfully lonely now; and Jelly literally sprang aside from every shadow.

CHAPTER V.

MISCHIEF BREWING IN NORTH INLET.

MORNING, noon, and night, whenever the small body of new workmen had to pass to and from the works, they were accompanied by the two policemen specially engaged for their protection, while others hovered within call. North Inlet, the ill-feeling of its old inhabitants increasing day by day, had become a dangerous place to walk in. It was not that all the men would have done violence. Ketlar, for instance, and others like him, well-disposed men by nature, sensible and quiet, would not have lifted a hand against those who had, in one sense of the word, displaced them. But they did this: they stood tamely by to look on, knowing quite well that some of their comrades only waited for their opportunity to kill, or disable —as might be—Richard North's new fol-

lowers. North Inlet was not quite so full as it used to be ; for some of the old inhabitants, weary and out of patience with hope deferred (hope they hardly knew of what, unless for the good time of plenty and equalization promised by the Trades' Union), had gone away on the tramp with their wives and little ones, seeking for a corner of the earth where work might be found, enough to bring in a crust to eat and a roof to shelter them. Others had decamped without their wives and children : and were in consequence being hunted for by the parish. North Inlet, take it on the whole, was in a sore plight. The men and women, reduced (most of them) by want and despair to apply to the parish for relief, found none accorded them in answer. They had brought themselves to this pass ; they had refused to work when work in plenty was to be had ; and, to come and ask to be supported in idleness by the parish was a procedure not to be tolerated ; as one resolute guardian, sitting at the head of a table, fiercely told them. Not as much as a loaf of bread would they get, added another, taking up the song. If it came to the pass that they were in danger of dying of hunger (as the applicants urged),

why they must come into the house with their wives and families—and a humiliating shame that would be for able-bodied men, the guardian added—but they would receive no relief out of doors. So North Inlet, not choosing to go into that unpopular refuge for the destitute, stayed out of it. And a fine plight its natives were in !

There was absolutely nothing left to pledge. Except children. And the pawnbroker, Ducket, could not be persuaded to take in them. Ducket had scarcely done so well by the strike as he had privately anticipated. He had not quite bargained for homes being offered to him wholesale ; for a glut of goods ; and the goods were mostly of that insignificant, if useful, character, that does not make a noise in the market. When nearly all the community are seeking to sell, it is clear that few can be wanting to buy.

An ignominious picture Ducket's interior premises presented. He was so over-laden that the collection had to hang in sight as well as out of it. A motley crowd. Strangers might have taken it for no better than a rag-and-bone shop, or a travelling tinker's caravan come to a standstill. Gowns (out at gathers

and slit at cuffs), petticoats, hats, bonnets, shoes, boots, coats, waistcoats, beds, books, saucepans, gridirons, tables, chairs, frying-pans, birdcages, sheets, blankets, Italian and flat irons, Dutch ovens, tea-kettles, brooms, umbrellas, candlesticks, mops, and a model of a ship under a glass case. That's only a few items of the list that would meet the eye on paying a visit to Mr. Ducket's : it was too comprehensive and varied for any recollection to record. The ship had belonged to Ketlar, one made and given him by his brother, who was mate of a vessel trading to Ceylon.

Now, with all these articles, once beloved household gods, staring them in the face whenever they passed Ducket's; with ragged backs and empty stomachs, with the past life of plenty to look back upon (and thirst perpetually for, after the manner of the fabled Tantalus), and no prospect whatever to look forward to, there was little wonder that this misguided body of men grew to find out that something of the old Satan was in them yet. A great deal of it, too. Perhaps remorse held its full share. They had intended it to have been so entirely for the better when they threw up work ; and it had turned out

so surprisingly for the worse. They had meant to return to work on their own terms ; earning more and toiling less : they had been led to believe that this result lay in their proper hands, and was as sure and safe as that the sun is overhead at noonday. Instead of that—here they were, in as deplorable a condition as human beings can well be. Time had been, not very long ago either, that the false step might have been redeemed ; Richard North had offered them their places again and on the old terms. Ay, and he had once conceded a portion of their demands—as they remembered well. But that time and that offer had gone by for ever. Fresh men (few though they were) worked in their places, and they themselves were starving.

The feeling against these new men was bitter enough ; it was far more bitter against the small number of old workmen who had gone back again. We are told that the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked : our own experience shows us that it is desperately selfish. They saw the employed men doing the work which was once theirs ; they saw them with good strong coats on, and food to eat. They themselves had neither coats

nor food : and the work they had rejected. It would not have seemed so hard had the work lain altogether in abeyance, or taken itself off from the place entirely : but to see these others doing it and living in comfort was more than mortal temper could brook. Only to watch the workmen going home regularly to their meals while they had no meals to go to, was dreadful.

This was not all. The men, seeing some things in the external world with a jaundice eye—yellow as ever was poor Arthur Bohun's when he had the actual disease—held to it that the fact of these others having taken work again, was the cause that kept themselves out of it. Richard North 'ud ha' come to, they said, but for these curs what had went sneaking back again to lick his hand. They called them worse names than that, but there's no need of repetition. If all on us had held out, Dick North must ha' give in. And this they repeated so constantly, in their ire, one to another, that at last they got actually to believe it. It was quite wrong, and they were wholly mistaken : for had Richard North not begun again in the cautious way he did, and at the old rate of wages

and time, he would not have recommenced at all: but the men refused to see this, and held to their notion, making it into a worse grievance than the lack of food. It is so convenient to have something substantial on which to vent blame: and unlimited power and permission to punch the obnoxious heads would have afforded intense gratification. Oh, it was very hard to bear. To see this small knot of men re-established in work, and to know that it was their own work once, and might have been theirs still! Peeping through hedges, hiding within door-ways, standing sulkily or derisively in the open ground, they would watch the employed men going to and fro, the two policemen tramping by their side. Many a bitter word, many a crushed oath, many a silent threat was levelled at the small band. Murder has been done from a state of mind not half as bad as they cherished.

“ What be you a-looking at, with them evil signs on your faces ?”

A group of malcontents, gazing out from a corner of North Inlet at the daily procession, found this question suddenly sounding on their ears. Mrs. Gass had stepped out of a dwelling close by, and put it. Their eyes

were following the escorted line of men coming home to their twelve o'clock dinner, so that she had not been observed.

They turned to her, and their faces dropped the threatening expression. A man named Poole, not too well respected at the most prosperous of times, and one of the worst malcontents since, took upon himself to answer. Boldly too.

“ We was a-taking the measure o' that small lot o' convics. A-wishing we could brand 'em.”

“ Ah,” said Mrs. Gass. “ It strikes me some of you have been wishing it before to-day. I'd like to give you a bit of advice, my men ; and you, especially, Poole. Take care you don't become convicts yourselves.”

“ For two pins, I'd do what 'ud make me one ; I'd do it to-day if others 'ud back me up,” was the rejoinder of Poole, who was in a more defiant mood than even he usually dared to show. He was a big, thick-set man, with shaggy light hair and a complexion of brick-dust. His clothes, originally fustian, had been worn and torn and jagged and patched and darned, until now they hardly held together : his clumsy shoes let in the water and the toes peeped out.

“ You are a nice jail-bird, Poole ! I don’t think you ever were much better than one,” added Mrs. Gass. To which candid avowal Poole only replied with a growl.

“ These hard times be enough to make jail-birds of all of us,” interposed another—Foster ; but speaking with civility. “ Why don’t the Government come down and interfere, and prevent our work being took out of our hands by these branded rascals ?”

“ You put the work out of your own hands,” said Mrs. Gass. “ As to interference, I should have thought you’d had about enough of that, by this time. If you had not suffered them blessed Trades Unionists to interfere with you, my men, you’d have been in full work now, happy and contented as the day’s long.”

“ What we did, we did for the best.”

“ What you did, you did in defiance of common sense, and of the best counsels of your best friends,” she said. “ How many times did your master show you what the upshot would be if you persisted in throwing away your work ?—how much breath did I waste over you, as I’m a-doing now, asking you all to avoid a strike—and after the strike

had come, day after day begging of you to end it?—could any picture be truer than mine was when I said what you'd bring yourselves to?—rags, and famine, and desolate homes. Could any plight be worse than this pickle that you've dropped to now?"

"No, it couldn't," answered Foster. "It's so bad that I say Government ought to interfere for us."

"If I was Government, I should interfere on one point—and that's with them agitating Unionists," bravely spoke Mrs. Gass. "I should put *them* down a bit."

"This is a free country, ma'am," struck in Ketlar, who made one of the group.

"Well, I'd used to think it was, Ketlar." she said; "but old ways seem to be turned upside down. What sort of freedom do *you* enjoy just now?—how much have you had of it since you bound yourselves sworn members of the Trades' Unions? You have wanted to work, and they've not let you: you'd like to be clothed and fed as you used to be, and to clothe and feed your folks at home, and they deny your exercising the means by which you may do it. What freedom or liberty is there

in that?—Come, now, Ketlar, tell me as a reasonable man."

"If the Trades' Unions could do as they wish, there'd be work and comfort for all of us."

"I doubt that, Ketlar."

"But they can't do it," added Ketlar. "The masters be obstinate and won't let 'em."

"That's just it," said Mrs. Gass. "If the Trades' Unions held the world in their hands, and there was no such things as masters and capital, why then they might secure their own way. But the masters have their own interests to look after, their businesses and what's embarked in 'em to defend: and the two sides are totally opposed one to another, and all that comes of it, or that will come of it is squabbling. You lose your work, the masters lose their trade, the Unionists fight it out fiercer than ever—and, between it all, the commerce of the country is coming to an end. Now my men, that is the bare truth: and you can't deny it if you try till midnight."

"Twouldn't be no longer much of a free country, if the Government put down the Trades' Unions," spoke a man satirically; one Cattleton.

“ But it ought to put down this arbitrary way they’ve got of preventing others working that want to work,” maintained Mrs. Gass. “ The Unionists be your worst enemies. I’m speaking, as you know I have been all along, of the head among ‘em that make laws for the rest ; not of poor sheep like you that have joined the Society in innocence. If them heads like to live without work themselves, and can point out a way by which others can live without it, well and good ; there’s no law against that, nor oughtn’t to be : but what I say Government ought to put down is this—their forcing you men to reject work when it’s offered you. It’s a sin and a shame that, through them, the country should be brought to imbecility, and you, its once free and brave workmen, to beggary.”

“ The thought has come over me at times that under the new state of things we are no better than slaves,” confessed Ketlar, his eyes wearing an excited look.

Mrs. Gass nearly executed a triumphant dance. “ Now you’ve just said it, Ketlar. Slaves. That’s exactly what you are ; and I wish to my heart all the workmen in England could open their eyes to it. You took a vow

to obey the dictates of the Trades' Union ; it has bound you hand and foot, body and soul. If a job of work lay to your hand, you dare not take it up, the Union masters saying you shall not ; no, not though you saw your little ones dying with famine before your eyes. It's the worst kind of slavery that ever fell on the land. Press-gangs used to be bad enough, but this beats 'em hollow."

There was no reply from any one of the men. Mrs. Gass had been a good friend to their families even recently ; and the old habits of respect to her, their mistress, had sway still. Perhaps some of them, too, silently assented to her reasoning.

" It's that much, the coercive interference, that I'd have put down," she resumed. " Let every workman be free to act on his own judgment, to take work or to leave it. Not but what it's too late to say it: as far as I believe, the mischief has gone too far to be remedied."

" It be mighty fine for the masters to cry out and say the Trades' Unions is our enemies ! Suppose we choose to call 'em our friends ?"

The words came from Poole. He had been lounging against the wall in sulky defiance, smoking and spitting by turns, and sending

the puffs of smoke into Mrs. Gass's bonnet : at any rate, taking no care that they did not get there. She did not mind smoke, however ; and she wore only her old black chip to-day, with its crape flowers.

"Put it at that, Poole, if you like," said she equably. "The Society's your good friend, let's say. How has it showed its friendship ? what has it done for you ?"

Mr. Poole did not condescend to say.

"It's not so hard to answer, Poole. The proofs lie on the surface—there's not one of the lot of you but may read 'em off-hand. It threw you all out of your good place of work that you had held for years under a good master, that you might have held, the chances were, up to the last day of your lives. It dismantled your homes and sent your things to the pawn-shop—you may go and look at 'em now, ornamenting the walls and hooks at Ducket's. It has reduced you to a mouldy crust, where you'd used to have good joints of fat beef; it has took your warm shoes and coats away, and sends you abroad half-naked. Your children are starving, some of them dead ; your wives are worn out with trouble and discontent. And this not for a temporary

time but for good : for, there's no prospect for you. No prospect, that I can see, as I'm a living woman. That's what your friends, as you call 'em, have done for you ; and for thousands and thousands beside you. I don't care what they meant : let it be that they meant well by you, and that you meant well —as I'm sure you did—in listening to 'em : the result is what I've said. And you are standing here this day, ruined men."

Mr. Poole puffed fiercely.

" What is to become of you, and of the others ruined like you, the Lord in Heaven only knows. It's a solemn question. When the best trade of the country's driven from it, there's no longer a place for workmen. Emigration, suggests some of the newspapers. Others says emigration's over-done for the present. We don't know what to believe. Any way, it's a hard thing that a good workman should find no employment in his native land, but must be packed off from it, something like as if he was transported, to be a exile for ever."

Poole, not liking the picture, broke into a furious oath or two. The other men looked sad enough.

“ You have been drinking, Poole,” said Mrs. Gass with dignity. “ Keep a civil tongue in your mouth before me if you please.”

“ I’ve not had no more nor half a pint,” growled Poole.

“ And that was half a pint too much,” said Mrs. Gass. “ When people’s insides are reduced by famine, half a pint is enough to upset their brains in a morning.”

“ What business have Richard North to go and engage them frogs o’ Frenchmen ?” demanded Poole—who had in truth taken too much for his good. “ What business have them other ratted fellows, as ought to have stuck by us, to go back to him ? It’s Richard North as wants to be transported.”

“ Richard North was a good master to you. The world never saw a better.”

“ He’s a rank bad man now.”

“ No, no—drat th’ tongue !” put in Ketlar to Poole. “ No good to abuse *him*.”

“ If you men had had a spark of gratitude, you’d have listened to Mr. Richard North, when he prayed you to go back to him,” said Mrs. Gass. “ No ; you wouldn’t ; and what has it done for him ? Why just ruined him, my men ; a’most as bare as you be ruined.”

It have took his hopes from him ; it have wasted his money, what little he had ; it have played the very dickens with his prospects. The business he had before never will and never can come back. If once you split a mirror to pieces, you can't put it together again. Mr. Richard has got a life of work to look forward to ; he may get a living, but he won't do much more. You men have at least the satisfaction of knowing that while you did for your own prosperity, you did also for his."

They had talked so long—for there has been no space to record all that passed—that it was hard upon one o'clock, and the small band of workmen and the two policemen were coming past again, back towards the works. The malignant look rose on Poole's face : a savage growl stuck in his throat.

"There'll be mischief yet," thought Mrs. Gass, as she turned away.

Sounds of a woman's sobbing were proceeding from an open door as she went down North Inlet, and Mrs. Gass stepped in to see what might be the matter. They came from Dawson's wife. Dawson had been beating her. The unhappy state to which they were

reduced tried the tempers of the men—of the women also, for that matter—rendering some of them little better than ferocious beasts. In the old days, when Dawson could keep himself and family in plenty, never a cross word had been heard from him: but all that was changed; and under the new order of things, it often came to blows. The wife had now been struck in the eye. Smarting under that, under ills of body and ills of mind, the woman enlarged on her wrongs to Mrs. Gass, and showed the mark; all of which at another time she would certainly have concealed. The home was miserably bare; the children, wan and thin, were in tatters like their mother; it was a comprehensive picture of wretchedness.

“And all through them idiots having throwed up their work at the dictates of the Trades’ Union!” was the wrathful comment of Mrs. Gass as she departed. “They’ve done for themselves in this world: and, to judge by the unchristian lives they be living, seem to be going on for the chance of doing for themselves in the next.”

As she reached her own house, the smart housemaid was showing Miss Dallory out of

it. That young lady, making a call on Mrs. Gass, had waited for her a short while, and was going away. They now went in together. Mrs. Gass, throwing open the door of her handsome drawing-room, began recounting at full the events of the morning; what she had heard, what seen.

"There'll be mischief done as sure as a gun," she concluded. "My belief is, that some of 'em would kill Mr. Richard if they got the chance."

Mary Dallory looked startled. "Kill *him*!" she cried. "Why, he has been their good friend always. He would have been so still, had they only let him."

"He's a better friend to 'em still than they know of," said Mrs. Gass, nodding her head. "Miss Mary, if ever there was a Christian man on earth, it is Richard North. His whole life has been one long thought for others. Who has kept up Dallory Hall but him? Who would have worked and slaved on, and on, not for benefit to himself, but to maintain his father's home, finding money cheerfully for Madam's wicked extravagance, to save his poor father pain, knowing that the old man had already more than he could bear. At

Mr. Richard's age he ought, before this, to have been making a home for himself and marrying : it's what he would have done under happier circumstances : but he has not been able ; he has sacrificed himself for others. He has done more for the men than they think of ; ay, even at the time that they were bringing ruin upon him—as they have done—and since. Richard North is worth his weight in gold. Heaven, that sees all, knows he is ; and he will sometime surely be rewarded for it. It may not be in this world, my dear ; for a great many of God's own best people go down to their very graves in nothing but disappointment and sorrow : but he'll find it in the next."

Never a word answered Mary Dallory. It might almost have been thought from her silence she did not subscribe to the sentiments. All she said was, that she must go. And Mrs. Gass went with her to the front door, talking. They had nearly reached it, when Miss Dallory stopped to put a question, lowering her voice as she did so.

"Have you heard any rumour about Dr. Rane ?"

Mrs. Gass knew what must be meant as

certainly as though it had been spoken. She turned cold, and hot, and cold again. For once her ready tongue failed her.

“It is something very dreadful,” continued Miss Dallory. “I do not like to speak it out. It—it has frightened me.”

“Lawk, my dear, don’t you pay no attention to such rubbish as rumours,” returned Mrs. Gass heartily. “*I* don’t. Folks says all sorts of things of me, I make little doubt; just as they be ready to do of other people. Let ‘em! We shan’t sleep none the worse for it. Good bye. I wish you’d have stayed to take a mouthful of my dinner. It’s as lovely a Turkey-poult as ever you saw, and a jam dumpling.”

CHAPTER VI.

DAYS OF PAIN.

PACING the shrubbery walk at Dallory Hall, a warm gray woollen shawl wrapped closely round her, clipping the narrow crape tucks of her flowing black silk dress ; and her pale, sweet, sad face turned up to the lowering sky, was Ellen Adair. The weather, cold and dull, gave tokens of coming winter. The last scattered leaves left on the nearly bare trees fell fluttering to the earth ; the wind, sighing through the branches, had a melancholy sound. All things seemed to speak of decay.

This ungenial cold had brought some complication with it. Just as Sir Nash Bohun was about to quit Dallory Hall, taking Arthur with him, the bleak wind struck him in an unguarded moment, and laid him up with inflammation of the chest. Sir Nash took to

his bed. One of the results was, that Arthur Bohun must remain at the Hall, and knew not how long he might have to be a fixture there. Sir Nash would not part with him. He had taken to regard him quite as his son.

Ellen Adair thought Fate was very cruel to her, taking one thing with another. And so it was. While they were together, she could not begin to forget him : and, to see him so continually with Mary Dallory, brought to her the keenest pain. She was but human : jealousy swayed her just as it does other people.

Another thing was beginning to trouble her—she did not hear from Mr. Adair. It was very strange. Never a letter had come from him since that one containing the permission to wed Arthur Bohun (as Mrs. Cumberland had read it), received at Eastsea. Ellen could not understand the silence. Her father used to write so regularly.

“ He ought not to remain here,” she murmured passionately as she walked, alluding to Arthur Bohun. “ *I* cannot help myself; I have nowhere else to go : but he ought to go in spite of Sir Nash.”

A grayer tinge seemed to float over and settle in the sky. The shrubbery seemed to grow darker. It was but the first advent of dusk, coming on early that melancholy evening.

“Will there ever be any brightness in my life again?” she continued, clasping her hands in pain. “Is this misery to last for ever? Did anyone, I wonder, ever go through such a trial, and live? Scarcely. I am afraid I am not very strong to bear things. But oh! —who could bear it? Last night I dreamt that Arthur came smiling to me, and said, ‘I have only been playing with you, Ellen; how could you think it was anything else?’—and in the strange tumult of joy that rushed over me, I awoke. For a few minutes after when remembrance rushed over me, I thought I should have died with the pain. If I could but have remained in the dream for ever!”

She sat down on one of the benches, and bent her aching brow on her hands. What with the gloom around, and her dark dress, some one who had turned into the walk, came sauntering on without observing her. Arthur Bohun. He started when she raised her head: his face was every whit as pale and sad as

hers ; but he could not help seeing how ill and woe-begone she looked.

“ I fear you are not well,” he stopped to say.

“ Oh—thank you—not very,” was the confused answer.

“ This is a trying time. Heaven knows I would save you from it if I could. I would have died to spare you. I would die still if by that means things for you could be righted. But it may not be. Time alone must be the healer.”

He had said this in rather a hard tone, as if he were angry with somebody or other ; perhaps Fate ; and went on his way with a quicker step, leaving never a touch of the hand, never a loving word, never a tender look behind him ; just as it had been that day in Dallory churchyard. Poor girl ! her heart felt as though it were breaking there and then.

When the echo of his footsteps had died away, she drew her shawl closer round her slender throat and passed out of the shrubbery. Hovering in a cross walk, unseen and unsuspected, was Madam. Not often did Madam allow herself to be off the watch. She had scanned the exit of Captain Bohun ; she

now saw Ellen's; and Madam's evil spirit rose up within her, and she advanced with an awful frown.

"Have you been walking with Captain Bohun, Miss Adair?"

"No, Madam."

"I—*thought*—I heard him talking with you."

"He came through the shrubbery when I was sitting there, and spoke to me in passing."

"Ah," said Madam. "It is well to be cautious. Captain Bohun is to marry Miss Dallory, remember: the less any other young woman has to say to him, the better."

To this speech—rather remarkable as coming from one who professed to be a gentlewoman—Ellen made no reply, save a bow as she passed onwards, with an erect head and self-possessed step, leaving Madam to her devices.

They seemed to be at her on all sides. There was no comfort anywhere, no solace. Ellen could have envied Bessy Rane in her grave.

And the farce that had to be kept up before the world! That very evening, as fate had it, Captain Bohun took Miss Adair in to dinner and sat next her, through some well-

intentioned blundering of Richard's. It had pleased Madam to invite a party; some seven or eight; it did not please Mr. North to come into dinner as he had been expected to do. Richard had to be host, and to take in a stout lady in green velvet, who was to have fallen to his father. There was a minute's confusion; Madam had gone on; Richard jumbled the wrong people together as if he were shaking up beans in a bag; and finally said aloud, "Arthur, will you take in Miss Adair?" And so they sat, side by side, and nobody observed that they did not converse (for that consisted of perhaps three monosyllables throughout the meal) or that anything was wrong. It is curious the length of time that two people may have lived estranged from each other in a household, and the rest suspect it not. Have you ever noticed this?—or tried it? It is remarkable, but very true.

After dinner came the drawing-room; and the evening was a more social one than had been known of late. Music, cards, talking. Young Mr. Ticknell (a relative of the old bankers' at Whitborough) was there: he had one of the sweetest voices ever accorded to man, and delighted them with his unaffected

singing. One song, that he chose after a few jesting words with Ellen, in allusion to her name, two of them at least had not bargained for. "Ellen Adair." Neither had heard it since that evening at Eastsea; so long past now, in the events that had followed, that it seemed to be removed from them by ages.

They had to listen. They could not do else. Ellen sat at the corner of the sofa in her pretty black net dress with its one white flower, that Mr. North had given her, in the middle of the corsage, and nothing at all, as usual, in her smooth brown hair; *he* was leaning against the wall, at right angles with her, his arms folded. And the verses went on to the last one.

"But now thou art cold to me,
Ellen Adair :
But now thou art cold to me,
Ellen, my dear !
Yet her I loved so well,
Still in my heart shall dwell :
Oh ! I shall ne'er forget
Ellen Adair."

She could not help it. Had it been to save her life, she could not have helped lifting her face and glancing at him as the refrain

died away. His eyes were fixed on her, a wistful, yearning expression in their depths ; an expression so sad that in itself it was all that can be conceived of pain. Ellen dropped her face again ; her agitation at that moment seeming greater than she knew how to suppress. Lifting her hand to shade her eyes, the plain gold ring, still worn on it, was conspicuously visible.

“ You look as though you had all the cares of the nation on your shoulders, Arthur.”

He started at the address : which came from Miss Dallory. She had gone close up to him. Rallying his senses, he smiled and answered carelessly. The next minute Ellen saw them walking across the room together, her hand within his arm.

The morning following this, Jelly made her appearance at the Hall, bringing up two letters. They were from Australia, from Mr. Adair. One was addressed to Mrs. Cumberland, the other to Ellen. Dr. Rane had bade Jelly bring them both : he considered that Miss Adair was now the only proper person to open Mrs. Cumberland’s. Ellen carried it to Mr. North, asking if she ought to open it —if it would be right. Certainly, Mr.

North answered, and confirmed the view Dr. Rane had taken, as conveyed in the message brought by Jelly.

Ellen carried the two letters to a remote and solitary spot in the garden, one that she was fond of frequenting, and in which she had never yet been intruded upon. She opened her own first: and there read what astonished her.

It appeared that after the dispatch of Mr. Adair's last letter to Mrs. Cumberland (the one already alluded to, that she had read with so much satisfaction to Arthur Bohun at Eastsea) he had been called from his station on business, and had remained absent some two or three months. Upon his return he found other letters awaiting him from Mrs. Cumberland, and learnt, to his astonishment, that the gentleman proposing marriage to Ellen was Arthur Bohun, son of the Major Bohun with whom Mr. Adair had once been intimate. (The reader has not forgotten how Mrs. Cumberland confused matters together in her mind, or that in her first letter she omitted to mention any name.) Dashing off some peremptory lines to Ellen—these that she was now reading—Mr. Adair retracted

his former consent. He absolutely forbade her to marry, or ever think again of, Arthur Bohun : a marriage between them would be nothing less than a calamity for both, he wrote, and also for himself. He added that in consequence of some unexpected death in his family, he had become its head, and was making preparations to return to Europe.

Wondering, trembling, Ellen dropped the letter, and opened Mrs. Cumberland's. An enclosure fell from it : a draft for a large sum of money ; which, as it appeared, Mrs. Cumberland was in the habit of receiving half-yearly for her charge of Ellen. Mr. Adair wrote in still more explicit terms on the subject of the proposed marriage to Mrs. Cumberland—almost in angry ones. *She*, of all people, he said, ought to know that a marriage between his daughter and the late Major Bohun's son would be unsuitable, improper, and most distasteful to himself. He did not understand how Mrs. Cumberland could have laid any such proposal before him, or allowed herself to think of it for a moment : unless indeed she had never been made acquainted with certain facts of the past, connected with himself and Major Bohun and

Major Bohun's wife, which Cumberland had known well. He concluded by saying, as he had to Ellen, that he hoped shortly to be in England. Both the letters had evidently been written in great haste and much perturbation : all minor matters being accounted as nothing, compared with the distinct and stern embargo laid on the marriage.

"So it has happened for the best," murmured Ellen to her breaking heart, as she folded up the letters and hid them away.

She took the draft to Mr. North's parlour. He put on his spectacles, and mastered its meaning by the help of some questions to Ellen.

"A hundred and fifty pounds for six months!" exclaimed he. "But surely, my dear, Mrs. Cumberland did not have three hundred a year with you! It's a vast sum—just for one young lady."

"She had two hundred, I think," said Ellen. "I did not know what the exact sum was until to-day: Mrs. Cumberland never used to talk to me about these matters. Papa allows me for myself fifty pounds every half-year. Mrs. Cumberland always gave me that."

"Ah," said Mr. North. "That's a good deal, too."

"Will you please to take the draft, sir; and let me have the fifty pounds from it at your convenience?"

Mr. North looked up as one who does not understand.

"The money is not for me, child."

"But I am staying here," she said deprecatingly.

He shook his head as he pushed back the slip of paper.

"Give it to Richard, my dear. He will know what to do about it, and what's right to be done. And so your father is coming home! We shall be sorry to lose you, Ellen. I am getting to love you, child. It seems that you have come in the place of my poor lost Bessy."

But Ellen was not sorry. The arrival of Mr. Adair would at least remove her from her present position, where every hour, as it passed, could but bring fresh pain.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. GASS IN THE SUNSHINE.

A fine and genial day in Dallory. As if the winter were minded to give 'place to a few hours brightness before it finally set in, or to make scant amends for the late season of cold and wet and boisterous winds, there intervened a day of almost summer weather. Mrs. Gass threw open her window and sat behind the geraniums enjoying the sun, exchanging salutations and gossip with as many of her acquaintance amidst the passers-by whose time would allow them to stop for it.

“How d’ye do, doctor? Isn’t this a lovely day?”

It was Dr. Rane, hurrying past. He turned for an instant to the window, his brow clearing. For some time now a curious look of care and perplexity had sat upon it.

“Indeed it is,” he answered. “I hope

it will last. Are you pretty well, Mrs. Gass?"

"I'm first-rate," said that lady. "A fine day, with the wind in the healthy north, always sets me up. I say, doctor, have you got the tontine money paid yet?"

"No," said Dr. Rane, his voice changing to a somewhat sullen tone. "There are all kinds of forms to be gone through, seemingly; and the Brothers Ticknell do not make themselves ill with haste. The two old men are past business, in my opinion. They were always slow and tiresome; it is something more than that now."

"Do you stir 'em well up?" questioned Mrs. Gass.

"When I get the chance of doing it; but that's very rare. Go when I will I can scarcely ever see anybody but the confidential clerk, old Latham; and he is as slow and methodical as his masters. 'We are not quite ready for you, sir; these matters must take their due course,' he says to me. I suppose the money will come, but I am tired of waiting for it."

"And what about your plans when you get it, doctor? Be they all cut and dried?"

“Time enough when I get the money to decide on them,” said the doctor shortly.

“But you still intend to leave Dallory Ham?”

“Oh, yes, I shall do that.”

“You won’t be going to that America place?”

“I think I shall. It is more than likely.”

“Well, I’d not banish myself from my native country for the best medical practice that ever shoes dropped into. You might be getting Red Indians for patients.”

Dr. Rane laughed a little; and there shone a kind of eager light in his eyes that seemed to speak of glad anticipation, of hope. Only himself knew how thankful he would be to get to another country and be clear of this.

“I wonder,” soliloquised Mrs. Gass to herself, as he walked on his way, “whether it is all straight-for’ard about that tontine? Have the Ticknells heard any of these ugly rumours that’s flying about; and be they keeping it back in consequence? If not, why it ought to have been paid over to him before this. The delay is odd—say the best of it. How d’ye do, sir? A nice day.”

A gentleman, passing, had raised his hat

to Mrs. Gass. She resumed her thread of thought.

“The rumours be spreading wider and getting nastier. They’ll go up with a bang presently, like a bomb-shell. I’m hearty sorry for him ; for I don’t believe—no, I *don’t*—that he’d do such a frightful thing. If it should turn out he did—why, then I shall blame myself ever after for having procrastinated of my intentions.”

Mrs. Gass paused in thought, and began to tell over those intentions, with a view, possibly, to see whether she was very much to blame.

“Finding Oliver and his wife couldn’t get the tontine paid ’em—and a hard case it was ! —I had it in my mind to say to ’em, ‘I’ll advance it to you. You’ll both be the better for something in my will when I’m gone—the doctor being my late husband’s own nephew, and the nearest relation left of him—and if two thousand pound of it will be of real good to you now, you shall have it.’, But I didn’t say it at once—who was to suppose there was such mortal need for hurry—and then she died. If the man’s innocent—and I believe he is—that Jelly ought to have the end of

her tongue burnt off with caustic. She—— halloo! Why there you are! Talk of the dickens and he'll appear."

"Were you talking of me?" asked Jelly: for Mrs. Gass had raised her voice with the surprise and brought it within Jelly's hearing. She had a small basket on her arm, under her black shawl, and turned to the window with the question.

"I was a thinking of you," responded Mrs. Gass. "Be you come out marketing?"

"I'm taking a few scraps to Ketlar's," replied Jelly, just showing the basket. "My mistress has given me general leave to give them any trifles not likely to be wanted at home. The cook's good-natured too. *This* is a jar of mutton-dripping, and some bones and scraps of bread."

"And how do you like the Beverages, Jelly?"

"Oh, very well. They are good ladies; but so serious and particular."

Mrs. Gass rose from her seat, pushed aside a corner of the stand of geraniums, and leaned her arms upon the window-sill, so as to bring her hearty red face nearly within Jelly's bonnet.

"I'll tell you what I was a thinking of, girl: it was about these awful whispers that's flying round. Go where you will you may hear 'em. Let it be within a dwelling-house or at the corner of a street, people's tongues be a cackling secretly of Dr. Rane's wife, and asking what she died of. I knew it would be so, Jelly."

Jelly turned a trifle paler. "They'll die away again perhaps," she said.

"Perhaps," repeated Mrs. Gass, sarcastically. "It's to be hoped they will for your sake. Jelly, I'd not stand in your shoes to be made a queen to-morrow."

"I'd not stand in somebody else's," returned Jelly, aggravated to the avowal. "I shall have some pretty good proof at hand if I'm forced to bring it out."

"What proof?"

"Well, I'd rather not say. You'd only ridicule it, Mrs. Gass, and blow me up into the bargain. I must be going."

"I guess it's moonshine, Jelly—like the ghost. Good morning."

Jelly went away with a hard and anything but a happy look, and Mrs. Gass took her seat again. Very shortly there came creeping

by, following the same direction as Jelly, a poor shivering woman, with a ragged shawl on her thin shoulders, and a white, pinched, hopeless face.

“Is that you, Susan Ketlar?”

Susan Ketlar turned and dropped a curtsey. Some of the women of North Inlet were even worse off than she was. She did have help now and then from Jelly.

“Yes, ma’am, it’s me.”

“I say, how long do you think you North Inlet people will be able to keep going—as things be at present?” demanded Mrs. Gass.

“The Lord above only knows,” said the woman, looking upwards with a piteous shiver. “Here’s the winter a coming on.”

“What does Ketlar think of affairs now?”

Ketlar’s wife shook her head. The men were not fond of disclosing what they might think, unless it was to one another. Ketlar never told her what *he* did.

“Is he still in love with the Trades’ Unions, and what they’ve done for him? My opinion is this, Susan Ketlar,” continued Mrs. Gass, after a pause: “that in every place where distress reigns, as it does here, and where it can be proved that the men have lost their

work through the dictates of the Society, the parish ought to go upon the society and make it feed the men and their families. If a law was passed to—that effect, we should hear less of the doings of the Trades Union people than we do. They'd draw in a bit, Susan ; they'd not give the gaping public quite so many of their procession-shows, and their flags, and their speeches. It would be a downright good law to make, mind you. A just one, too. If the society forbids men to work, and so takes the bread necessary for life out of their mouths, it is but fair they should find 'em bread to replace it."

A kind of hopeful look came into the woman's eyes. "Ma'am, I said as good as this to Ketlar only yesterday. Seeing that it was the society that had took the bread from us, and that the consequences had been bad instead of good, for we were starving, the society ought to put us into work again. It might bestir itself to do that : or else support us while we got into something."

Mrs. Gass smiled pityingly. "You must be credulous, Susan Ketlar, to fancy the Society can put 'em into work again. Where's the work to come from ? Well, it's not your

fault, my poor woman, and there's more people than me sorry for you all. I say," Mrs. Gass lowered her voice, "be any of the men talking treason still? You know what I mean."

Susan Ketlar glanced over both her shoulders to see that nobody was within hearing, before she gave the answering whisper.

"They be always a-talking it. I can see it in their faces as they stand together. Not Ketlar, ma'am, he'd stop it if he could: he don't wish harm to none."

"Ah. I wish to goodness they'd all betake themselves off from the place. Though it's hard to say it, for there's no other open to 'em that I see. Well, you go on home, Susan. Fanny Jelly's just gone there with a basket of scraps. Stay a minute, though."

Mrs. Gass quitted the room, calling to one of her servants. When she came back she had a half-pint physic bottle corked up.

"It's a drop o' beer," she said. "For yourself, mind, not for Ketlar. You want it, I know. Put it under your shawl. It 'll wash down Jelly's scraps."

The woman went along with a grateful sob. And Mrs. Gass sat on and enjoyed the sun-

shine. Just then Mary Dallory came by in her little low pony-carriage. She often drove about in it alone. Seeing Mrs. Gass, she pulled up. That lady, making no ceremony, went out in her cap, and stood talking.

“I hear you have left the Hall, my dear,” she said, when the gossip was coming to an end.

“Ages ago,” replied Miss Dallory. “Frank is home again, and he wanted me.”

“How did you enjoy your visit on the whole?”

“Pretty well. It was not very lively, especially after Sir Nash was taken ill.”

“He is better, Mr. Richard tells me,” said the elder lady.

“Yes; he can sit up now. I went to see him yesterday.”

“Captain Bohun looks but poorly still.”

“His illness was a bad one. Fancy his getting jaundice! I had thought it was only old people who got that.”

“Them jaunders attacks young and old. Once the liver gets out of order, there’s no telling. Captain Bohun was born in India; and they be more liable to liver complaint, it’s said, than others. You are driving alone to-day as usual,” continued Mrs. Gass.

“ I like to be independent. Frank won’t put himself into this little chaise ; he says it is no higher than a respectable wheelbarrow ; and I’m sure I am not going to have a groom stuck at my side.”

“ If all tales told are true, you’ll soon run a chance of losing your independence,” rejoined Mrs. Gass. “ People say a certain young lady, not a hundred miles at this moment away from my elbow, is likely to give away her heart.”

Instead of replying, Mary Dallory blushed violently. Observant Mrs. Gass saw and noticed it.

“ Then it is true !” she exclaimed.

“ What’s true ?” asked Mary.

“ That you are likely to be married.”

“ No, it is not.”

“ My dear, you may as well tell me. You know me well : that I’ll keep counsel.”

“ But I have nothing to tell you. How can I imagine what you mean ?”

“ ’Twasn’t more than a hint of it I had : that Captain Bohun—Sir Arthur as he will be—was making up his mind to Miss Dallory, and she to him. Miss Mary, is it so ?”

“ Did Madam tell you that ?”

“ Madam wouldn’t be likely to tell me—all of us in Dallory are just as so much dust under her feet ; quite beneath being spoken to. No : ’twas her maid, Parrit, dropped it to me. She had heard it through Madam though.”

Mary Dallory laughed a little and flicked the ear of the rough Welsh pony. “ I fancy Madam would like it,” she said,

“ Who wouldn’t ?” rejoined Mrs. Gass. “ I put the question to Richard North—Whether there was anything in it ? He answered that there might be ; he knew that it was wished for.”

“ Richard North said that, did he—that it might be ? Of course so it might—and may—for aught he can tell.”

“ But, my dear Miss Mary, is it ?”

“ Well—to tell you the truth, the offer’s not made yet. When it comes, why then—I daresay it will be all right.”

“ Meaning that you’ll take him.”

“ Meaning that—oh but it is not right to tell tales beforehand, even to you, Mrs. Gass,” she broke off with a sunny laugh. “ Let the offer come. I wish it would.”

“ You would like it to come, child ?”

“ Yes, I think I should.”

“Then be sure it will. And God bless you, my dear, and bring you happiness whatever turns out. Though it is not just the marriage I had carved out in my own mind for one of the two of you.”

She meant for Arthur Bohun. Mary Dallory thought she meant herself; and laughed again as the pony trotted away.

The next friend that passed the window after Mrs. Gass resumed her seat, was Richard North. He did not stop at the window but went in. Some matter of business connected with the winding up of the old firm of North and Gass, had arisen, rendering it necessary that he should see Mrs. Gass.

“Do as you think best, Mr. Richard,” she said, after they had talked together for a few minutes. “Please yourself, sir, and you’ll please me. We’ll leave it at that: I know it’s all safe in your hands.”

“Then I will do as I propose,” said Richard.

“I’ve had Miss Dallory here—that is, in her pony-chay afore the door,” observed Mrs. Gass. “I taxed her with what I’d heard about her and Captain Bohun. She didn’t say it was, and she didn’t say it wasn’t: but

Mr. Richard, I think there's truth in it. She as good as said she'd like him to make her an offer : and she did say Madam wished it. So I suppose we shall have wedding cards afore a year's gone over our heads. In their case —him next step to a baronite, and she rolling in money—there's nothing to wait for."

"Nothing," mechanically answered Richard North.

"But I did think, as to him, that it would have been Ellen Adair. Talking of that, Mr. Richard, what is it that's amiss with her ?"

"With her ?—with whom ?" cried Richard, starting out of a reverie.

"With that sweet young lady, Ellen Adair ?"

"There's nothing amiss with her that I know of."

"Isn't there ! There *is*, Mr. Richard, if my judgment and eyes is to be trusted. Each time I see her, she strikes me as looking worse and worse. You notice her, sir. Perhaps now the clue has been given, you'll see it too. I once knew a little girl, Mr. Richard, that was dying quietly under her friends' very eyes, and they never saw it. Never saw it at all, till a aunt came over from another county ;

she started back when she saw the child and says, 'Why, what have you been doing with her? she's dying.' They was took aback at that, and called in the first doctor: but it was too late. I don't say Ellen Adair is dying, Mr. Richard; 'tain't likely; but I'm sure she is not all right. Whether it's on the mind, or whether it's on the body, or whether it's on the nerves, I'm not prepared to say; but it's somewhere."

"I will take notice," said Richard.

"Anything fresh up about the men, Mr. Richard?"

"Nothing. Except that my workmen are getting afraid to stir out at night, and the disaffection increases amidst the others. I cannot see what is to be the end of it," he continued. "I do not mean of this rivalry, but of the sad state to which the men and their families are reduced. I often wish I did not think of it so much: it is like a chain binding me that I cannot get loose from. I wish I could help them to get work elsewhere."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Gass, "work elsewhere is very nice to look at in dreamland; but I'm afraid it'll never be seen for 'em in reality.

It's not as if work was going a-begging: it have been broke up everywhere, Mr. Richard; and shoals and shoals of men, destitute as our own, be tramping about at this minute, like so many old ravens with their mouths open, ready to pick up any that may fall."

Richard North went home, his mind full of what Mrs. Gass had said about Ellen Adair. *Was* she looking so ill? He found her sitting in the open seat near what would be in spring the tulip bed; Mr. North having just gone in and left her. Yes: Richard saw that she did look ill: the face was wan, the eyes were sad and weary. She was coughing as he went up to her: it was a short, hacking cough, not a violent one. Some time ago she had caught a cold, and it seemed to hang about her still.

"Are you well, Ellen?" he asked, as he sat down beside her.

"Yes, I believe so," was her reply. "Why?"

"Because I don't think you look well."

A soft colour, like the pink on a sea-shell, stole over her cheeks as Richard said this. But she kept silence.

"You know, Ellen, we agreed to be as brother and sister. I wish to take care of you as

such : to shield you from all ill so far as I can.
Are you happy here ?”

A moment’s pause, and then Ellen took courage to say that she was not happy.

“ I would like to go elsewhere,” she said,
“ Oh Richard, if it could but be managed !”

“ But it cannot,” he answered.

“ I have plenty of money, Richard.”

“ My dear, it is not that. Of course you have plenty. I fancy, by sundry signs, that you will be a very rich young lady,” he added, slightly laughing. “ But you have no near friends in England, and we could not entrust you to strangers.”

“ If I could board somewhere ?—in some clergyman’s family, or something of that.”

“ Ellen !”

She raised her hand from underneath the grey shawl—her favourite out-door covering, for the shawl was warm—and passed it across her brow. In every movement there was a languor that spoke of weariness of body or weariness of spirit.

“ When Mr. Adair comes home, if he found you had been placed out somewhere ‘ to board,’ what would he think and say of us ? Put the question to yourself, Ellen.”

“ I would tell him I went of my own accord.”

“ But, my dear, you cannot be allowed to do things of your own accord if they are not expedient. I and my father are appointed to take charge of you, and see that you do not. You must remain with us, Ellen, until Mr. Adair shall come.”

It was even so. Ellen’s better judgment acknowledged it, in the midst of her great wish to get away. A wish : and not a wish. To be where Arthur Bohun was, brought her still the most intense happiness ; and this, in spite of the pain surrounding it, she would not willingly have relinquished : but the cruelty of his conduct—of their estrangement —was more than she knew how to bear. It was making her ill, and she felt that it was. There was, however, no help for it. As Richard said, she had no friends to whom they could entrust her. The lady in whose house she was educated had recently died, and the establishment was being broken up.

Ten times a day she longed to say to Arthur Bohun, “ You are ungenerous to stay here. I cannot help myself, but you might.” But pride tied her tongue.

“It may be months yet before papa comes, Richard.”

“And if it should be! We must try to make you happier with us.”

“I think I must go in,” she said, after a pause of silence. “The day has been very fine, but it is getting cold now.”

Folding the grey shawl closer to her throat, as if she felt the chill there, and coughing a little as she walked, Ellen crossed round to the hall door, and entered. Richard, occupied in watching her and busy with his own thoughts, did not perceive the almost silent approach of Arthur Bohun, who came slowly up from behind.

“Well, Dick, old fellow!”

“Why, where did you spring from?” asked Richard, as Arthur flung himself down in the place vacated by Ellen.

“I have been under that tree yonder, smoking a cigar. It has a good broad trunk to lean against.”

“I thought the doctors had forbidden you to smoke.”

“So they have. Until I should get stronger. One can’t obey orders quite strictly always. I don’t suppose it matters much one

way or the other. You have been enjoying a confidential chat, Dick."

"Yes," replied Richard. He had not felt very friendly in his heart towards Arthur for some time past. What was the meaning of his changed behaviour to Ellen Adair?—what of the new friendship with Mary Dallory? Richard North could not forgive dishonour; and he believed Arthur Bohun was steeping himself in it to the backbone.

"Were you making love, Dick?"

Richard turned his eyes in silence on the questioner.

"She and I have had to part, Dick. I always thought you admired and esteemed her almost more, perhaps quite more, than you do any other woman. So if you are thinking of her——"

"Be silent," sternly interrupted Richard, rising in anger. "Are you a man?—are you a gentleman? Or are you what I have been thinking you lately—a false-hearted, despicable knave?"

Whatever Arthur Bohun might be, he was just then in desperate agitation. Rising, too, he seized Richard's hands.

“Don’t you see that it was but sorry jesting, Richard ? Pretending to a bit of pleasantry with myself, to wile away for a moment my awful weight of torment. I am all that you say of me ; and I cannot help myself.”

“Not help yourself ?”

“As heaven is my witness, no ! If I could take you into confidence—and perhaps I may one of these days, for I long to do it—you would see that I tell you truth.”

“Why have you parted with Ellen Adair ?—she and you *have* parted ? You have just said so.”

“We have parted for life. For ever.”

“You were on the point of marriage with her but a short time back !”

“No two people can be much nearer marriage than she and I were. It was within half an hour of it, Dick ; and yet we have parted.”

“By your doings, or hers ?”

“By mine.”

“I thought so.”

“Dick, I have been *compelled* to it. When you shall know all, you will acknowledge that I could not do otherwise. And yet, in spite of

this—this compelling power—I feel that to her I have been but a false-hearted knave, as you aptly style me; a despicable, dishonourable man. My father fell into dishonour—or rather had it forced upon him by another—and he could not survive it; he shot himself. Did you know it, Dick?"

"Shot himself!" repeated Richard in his surprise. "No, I never knew that. I thought he died of sunstroke."

"My father shot himself," wailed Arthur. "He could not live dishonoured. Dick, old fellow, there are moments when I feel tempted to do as he did."

"What—because you have parted with Ellen?"

"No. That's bitter enough to bear; but I can battle with it. It is the other thing, the dishonour. That is always present with me, always haunting me night and day; I know not how to live under it."

"I do not understand at all," said Richard. "You are master of your own actions."

"In this case I have not been: my line of conduct was forced upon me. I cannot explain. Don't judge me too harshly, my friend. I am bad enough, heaven knows,

but not quite as bad, perhaps, as you have been deeming me."

And, wringing the hands he held in a grasp of pain, Arthur Bohun went limping away, leaving Richard lost in wonder.

He limped away to indulge his pain where no mortal eye could be upon him. Parted from Ellen Adair, the whole world was to him as nothing. The sense of dishonour lay ever upon him, the shame of his conduct to her was present to him night and day. With all his heart he wished James Bohun had not died, that there might have been no question of his succession. He would then have gone somewhere away with her, change his name, be happy in obscurity. But there was no place unfrequented by man and tourists ; he could not hide his wife's face ; and she might be recognised as the daughter of Adair the convict. Besides, would it not be an offence against heaven if he wedded the daughter of the man who had caused the death of his father ? No ; happiness might not be his. Look where he would, there was nothing around him but a sea of pain.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONCE AGAIN.

JELLY lived, so to say, with her feet on a volcano. She felt that, figuratively speaking, there was not an hour of the day or night but she might be blown up. The rumours as to the death of Mrs. Rane were becoming more frightful ; they stole up and down Dallory like an insinuating tongue of flame, and Jelly had the satisfaction of knowing that it was she who had first set the flame alight. It was all very well for her to say that she had made herself safe by securing the evidence Thomas Hepburn could give : but in her secret conscience she knew that she was *not* secure ; and that, even in spite of that evidence, Dr. Rane might chance to be innocent. If so, why a pretty box she would find herself in. There was no help for it ; she could do nothing. The flaming tongue

went twisting itself in and out, and she could not still it.

One night Jelly was lying awake, according to custom now, buried deep in some horrid visions that had lately begun to haunt her : now of being chained to some other woman and working in a gang ; now of stepping incessantly up a revolving treadmill ; and now of picking cakum with her nails and teeth. Twisting round in the bed, to escape, if possible, these imaginary pictures, she suddenly heard her door knocked at. A loud hasty knock ; and now a louder. Jelly went into a hot fume, and then turned cold as ice. Had the officers of the law come to arrest her ?

“ Who’s there ?—what is it ? ” she asked faintly, not daring to sit up in bed.

“ Art thee awake, Jelly ? ” came the gentle response, as her door was opened a few inches. “ I am very sorry to have to ask thee to get up, but my mother is worse. Make haste, please.”

Had Miss Beverage’s voice been that of an angel, it could not have seemed sweeter to Jelly just then. The relief was great.

“ I’ll get up instantly, ma’am,” was the ready answer—and Miss Beverage wondered

that it should have in it a tone of joyous gratitude. "I'll be with you at once."

Mrs. Beverage was subject to violent but rare attacks of dangerous spasms. She had felt ill before she went to bed, but hoped it would be nothing. Jelly and her own two servants were soon at her bedside. She was very ill. Some of them ran to get hot water ready; Jelly thought it would be well to call in Dr. Rane.

"I should like the doctor to see her; at the same time I grieve to arouse him from his sleep," said Miss Beverage.

"Law, ma'am, that's nothing to doctors; they are used to it," cried Jelly.

"Mother, would thee like Oliver Rane fetched?" asked Miss Beverage, bending over the suffering lady.

"Yes—yes," was the feeble answer. "I am very ill, Sarah."

"Thee go, then, Jelly."

Away went Jelly. Unbarring their own front door, she passed out of it, and approached Dr. Rane's. The doctor's professional lamp burnt clearly, and, to her great surprise, Jelly saw that the door was not closed.

"He cannot have gone to bed to-night,"

she thought, as she walked in without ringing. It was past three.

But the house seemed to be in stillness and darkness. Jelly left the front door open, and the light shone a little way into the passage. She tried the surgery door ; it was locked outside ; she tried the dining-room ; the key of that was also turned ; the kitchen door stood open, but it was all in darkness.

“ He has gone to bed and forgot to shut up,” was the conclusion Jelly now arrived at. “ I’ll go up and call him.”

Groping her way up-stairs, she had nearly reached the top, when a pale white light suddenly illumined the landing—just the same kind of faint semi-light that Jelly saw once before, and that she remembered all too well. Raising her head hastily to look, for it had been bent downwards, there stood—what ?

Not quite at the moment did Jelly know what. Not in the first startled access of terror did she recognise clearly the features of Bessy Rane. It was she, all too surely : that is, the likeness of what she had been. She seemed to stand almost face to face with Jelly : Jelly nearly at the top of the staircase, she facing it before her. The light was even

more faint in front of the figure than behind : but there was no mistaking it. What it was dressed in or whence it came, Jelly never knew : there it was—the form and the face of Bessy Rane. With an awful cry of agony, that echoed to the ends of the empty house in the night's silence, Jelly turned and flew down again.

She never looked behind. Out at the front door went she, banging it, in her terror, to keep in what might be following her ; and she nearly gave vent to another scream when she found herself touched by some one coming in at the gate, and saw that it was Dr. Rane.

“ I am called out to a country patient,” he quietly said. “ While I was putting the horse to the gig, an impression came over me that I had left my house door open, so I thought I had better come back and see. What are you doing here at this hour, Jelly ? Anybody ill ? ”

Jelly was in frightful distress and confusion of mind. Clutching hold of his arm as if it gave her protection, she sobbed for an instant or two in hysterical nervousness. Dr. Rane stared at her, not knowing what to make of

it. He began to think she must require his services herself.

“Sir—do you know—do you know who is in the house?”

“Nobody’s there: unless they’ve got in these last few minutes through the door—which I suppose I did leave open,” was Dr. Rane’s rejoinder, and his calm composure contrasted strongly with Jelly’s emotion. “When I go out of my house at night, I carry my household with me, Jelly.”

“Your wife’s there,” she whispered with a bursting sob. “Sir, it is as true as that I am alive to tell it.”

“What do you say?”

Jelly’s answer was to relate what she had seen. When Dr. Rane had gathered in her full meaning, he turned very angry.

“Why, you must be mad, woman,” he cried in a low voice of concentrated passion. “This is the second time. How dare you invent such folly?”

“I swear that her ghost walks, and that it is in there now,” exclaimed Jelly, nearly beside herself. “It is on the landing, exactly where I saw it before. Why should she come again?—why should she haunt that one

particular spot? Sir, don't look at me like that. You know I would not invent such a thing."

"Your fancy invents it, and then you speak of it as if it were fact. How dare you?"

But he could not appease Jelly: he could not talk her out of the belief of her eyesight. And the doctor saw it was useless to try.

"Why, why should her poor ghost walk?" bewailed Jelly, wringing her hands in distress.

"I'm sure I don't know why it should walk," returned the doctor, as if he would humour Jelly and at the same time make a mockery of her words. "It never walks when I am in the house." But the ridicule was lost on Jelly.

"She can't lie quiet in her grave. What cause is there?—oh, what dreadful mystery is it?"

Dr. Rane looked as though he would have liked to knock Jelly down. "I begin to think that you are either a fool or a knave," he cried. "What brought you in my house at three o'clock in the morning?"

The question, together with his almost

irrepressible rage, served to recal Jelly's scattered senses. She told about the illness of Mrs. Beverage, and asked if he would come in.

"No, I cannot come," said Dr. Rane quite savagely, for it seemed that he could not get over his anger. "I am called out to a case of sudden emergency and have no time to waste over Mrs. Beverage. If she wants a doctor, get Seeley."

He opened his door with his latch-key, and shut it fiercely after him. However, it seemed that he got over his ill humour, for when Jelly was slowly walking across the road towards Mr. Seeley's, Dr. Rane came out again, called her back, and said he would spare a minute or two.

With a sharp caution to Jelly not to make the same foolish exhibition of herself to others that she had to him, he went up to Mrs. Beverage—who was then easier, and had dozed off to sleep. Giving a few general directions in case the paroxysm should return, Dr. Rane departed. About ten minutes afterwards, Jelly was in her room, which looked towards the lane at the back, when she heard his gig come driving down it and

stop at his garden door. After waiting there a short while,—he had probably come in for some case of instruments—it went away quickly across country.

The horse and gig that the doctor used belonged to the public-house hard by. Dr. Rane had a key of the stables, so that if he wanted to go out during the night, he could harness the horse to the gig without disturbing any one. When medical men are not able to keep horses and grooms of their own, they put up contentedly with many shifts that richer practitioners would not.

“If he had not said beforehand that he was putting the horse to, I should have thought he’d gone out because he daredn’t stay in the house,” muttered Jelly, as she flattened her face against the window-pane, to look after the doctor and the gig. She could see neither: the night was very dark.

Jelly’s mind was in a chaos. What she had witnessed caused her still to shake and tremble as though she had the ague; and she did fully believe that she was in danger of becoming what the doctor had told her she was already—mad.

Suddenly, there arose a cry in the house.

Mrs. Beverage was worse. The paroxysm had returned so violently, that it seemed to the frightened beholders as though she would die in it. Dr. Rane was not attainable, and Miss Beverage sent one of the under servants running for Mr. Seeley. Who came promptly.

In about an hour the danger had passed ; the house was quiet again, and Mr. Seeley was at liberty to return to his rest. He had crossed the road to his own door when he heard a step following him. Turning round, he saw Jelly.

“ Surely she is not ill again ! ” he hastily exclaimed.

“ No, sir, she is all right I think now. Mr. Seeley,” added Jelly in agitation so marked that he could not help noticing it, “ I want to speak to you : I want to tell you something. I must tell somebody, or I shall never live till morning light.”

“ Are *you* ill ? ” questioned Mr. Seeley.

“ When I was holding the flannels just now, and otherwise helping you, sir, you might have seen that I hadn’t all my wits about me. Miss Beverage looked at me once or twice, as much as to ask what had become

of 'em. Mr. Seeley, I have got the weight of a most awful secret upon me, and I can't any longer bear with it."

"A secret!" repeated Mr. Seeley.

Jelly drew so near to him that her arm touched his. She pointed to the house of Dr. Rane, and lowered her voice to speak in a whisper.

"Mrs. Rane's there."

He looked across at the house—so apparently still and peaceful behind its white blinds; he turned and looked at Jelly. Not a syllable did he understand of her meaning.

"Mrs. Rane comes again, sir. She haunts the house. I have seen her twice with my own eyes. Once, the night of her death, just after she had been put in her coffin; and again this blessed night."

"Why what on earth do you mean?" questioned Mr. Seeley in amazement. "Mrs. Rane haunts the house?—I don't comprehend."

"Her ghost does, sir. It is in it now."

The surgeon put his back against his door-post, and seemed as though he should never leave off staring at Jelly. He fully thought

her mind was wandering. A minute or two passed in utter silence.

“ My good woman, you need a composing draught as badly as Friend Beverage did just now. What is the matter with you, Jelly ?”

In reply, Jelly told her story,—in regard to the appearance of Mrs. Rane—told it from the beginning. But she cautiously avoided all mention of suspicion as to unfair play : in fact she did not mention Dr. Rane’s name. Mr. Seeley listened quietly, as though he were hearing a fairy tale.

“ Have you spoken of this to Dr. Rane ?” was his first question.

“ Yes, sir : both times. To-night I met him as I was rushing out of the house in my terror.”

“ What does he say to it ?”

“ He ridicules it. He says it’s my fancy, and is in a towering rage with me. Mrs. Gass asked whether I had been drinking beer. People are hard of belief as to such things.”

“ You told Mrs. Gass, then ?”

“ I told her the first time. I was in great distress and perplexity, and I mentioned it to

her as we sat together in the churchyard looking at Mrs. Rane's funeral."

"What did Mrs. Gass say?"

"She cautioned me never to speak of it again to living soul. Neither of that, nor of —of anything. But this blessed night, sir, I have seen it again: and if it is to go on like this, I shall soon be in a lunatic asylum."

Mr. Seeley had no faith in ghosts. At the same time he saw how implicit was Jelly's belief in what she fancied she had seen, and the distressed state of mind it had induced. What to answer for the best, he did not know. If he threw ridicule on the story, it would make no sort of impression; if he pretended to receive it as truth, it could not bring her ease.

"Jelly," said he on impulse, "I should not believe in a ghost if I saw one."

"I didn't believe in them once," answered Jelly. "But seeing brings belief."

"I'm sure I don't know what to say to you," was his candid avowal. "You are evidently so imbued with your own view of the matter, that any contrary argument would be useless."

"What troubles me is this," resumed Jelly,

as if she had not heard him. " *Why* is it that she is unable to rest, poor thing? What's the reason?"

" I should say there was no reason," observed Mr. Seeley.

" Should you, sir?"

Jelly spoke significantly, and he looked at her keenly. There was a professional lamp over the door, as there was over Dr. Rane's; and their faces were distinct to each other. The tone had been a slip in the heat of argument, and Jelly grew cautious again.

" What am I to do, sir?"

" Indeed I cannot tell you, Jelly. There is only one thing to do, I should say—get out of the fancy again as quickly as you can."

" You think I did not see it!"

" I think all ghost-stories proceed purely from an excited imagination," said the surgeon.

" You have not lived here very long, sir, but you have been here quite long enough to know that I've not got much imagination. I don't remember that, before this happened, I ever felt excited in my whole life. My nature's not that way. The first time I saw her, I had come in, as I say, from Ketlar's;

and all I was thinking of was Dinah's negligence in not putting out the matches for me. I declare that when I saw her, poor thing, that night, with her fixed eyes staring at me, I was as cool as any cucumber. She stood there some time, looking at me with a stony stare, as it seemed, and I stood in the dark, looking at her. I thought it was herself, Mr. Seeley, and felt glad that she was able to be out of bed. In the morning, when I heard she was dead, and shut up in her coffin, I thought she must have been shut in it alive. You were the first I asked whether it was true that she was dead," added Jelly, warming with the sudden recollection. "I saw you standing here at the door after Dinah told me, and I stepped over."

The surgeon nodded. He remembered it.

"To-night when I went for Dr. Rane, there was not a thought or particle of superstition in my mind. I was troubled about Mrs. Beverage, and wondering what carelessness brought the doctor's front door open. And there she stood!—facing me as I went up the stairs—just in the same identical spot that she had stood the time before. Ugh!" broke off Jelly, with a shudder. "But don't say again,

sir, please, that it was my excited imagination.”

“I could tell you stories of the imagination that would surprise you, Jelly.”

“If it was not Mrs. Rane—that is, her apparition—that appeared to me to-night, sir, and that appeared to me the other night, I wish these eyes may never behold anything again,” spoke Jelly, solemnly. And Mr. Seeley saw how worse than futile it would be to contend farther.

“Jelly, why have you told me this? I do not see how I can help you.”

“I’ve told it you because the weight of keeping it to myself was greater than I could bear,” she replied. “It’s an awful thing, and a cruel thing, that it should be just *me* that’s signalled out for it. I think I know why: and I am nearly torn to pieces with the responsibility. As to helping me, sir, I don’t think that you or anybody else can do that. Did you see Mrs. Rane after she died?”

The question was put abruptly, but in a tone that Jelly meant to be indifferent. Mr. Seeley replied in a very matter-of-fact manner.

“No.”

“Well, I’ll wish you good night, sir. Keeping you talking here will do no good.”

“Good morning, I should say,” returned the surgeon.

Jelly had reached her own gate, when she paused for a moment and then turned back across the road. The surgeon had not moved. He still had his back against his door-post, and was apparently gazing at Dr. Rane’s. Jelly said what she had come back to say.

“You will please not speak of this again to any one, Mr. Seeley. There are reasons why.”

“Not I, Jelly,” was the hearty rejoinder. “I don’t want to be laughed at in Dallory as the retailer of a ghost-story.”

“Thank you, sir.”

With that, the surgeon passed into his dwelling, and Jelly went over to hers. And the winter’s night wore on to its close.

In the favourable re-action that had fallen on Mrs. Beverage, Jelly might have gone to rest again had she so chosen. But she did not. There could be neither rest nor sleep for her. She sat by the kitchen fire, and drank sundry cups of tea : and rather thought, what with one perplexity and another, that it was not sinful to wish herself dead.

In the morning about seven o'clock, when she was upstairs in her chamber, she heard the noise of a gig in the lane, and looked out. It was Dr. Rane, returning from his visit to his sick patient. His face was white. An ordinary passer-by would have said the doctor was cold : Jelly drew a different conclusion.

"It's his conscience," she mentally whispered. "It's the thought of having to dwell in his house now that he knows what's in it. He might have set it down to my fancy the first time : he can't this. Who knows, either, but what she appears to *him* ?—who knows ?—but it strikes me his nerves are made of iron. He must have been driving like mad, too, by the way the gig's splashed !" added Jelly, catching a glimpse of the state of the vehicle as it whirled round the corner towards the public-house. "Good heavens ! what is to be done ?—what is to be done about this dreadful secret ? Why should it have fallen upon **ME** ?"

CHAPTER IX.

COMING VERY NEAR.

IT is not all at once, when rumours of this grave character arise, that they come to a climax. Time must be allowed them to grow and settle. It came at length, however, here. The doubts ripened to convictions ; the semi-suppressed breathings widened into broad assertions : Oliver Rane had certainly murdered his wife for the sake of getting the tontine money. People affirmed it one to another as they met in the street—that is (throwing the onus off themselves), said that others affirmed it. Old Phillis heard it one day, and nearly fell down in a fit. She did not altogether believe it ; but nevertheless from that time she could not speak to her master without visibly shaking. The doctor thought she must be suffering from incipient palsy. At length it penetrated to

Dallory Hall, to the ears of Madam ; and upon Madam it produced an extraordinary effect.

It has been stated throughout that Mrs. North had conceived a violent dislike to Dr. Rane ; or at least, that she persistently acted against him in a manner that gave the impression that she had. As if she had only waited for this rumour to accuse him of something tangible, Madam took it up and made the cause her own. She never appeared to question the truth of the report, or to enquire what its grounds might be ; she drove about, almost like a mad woman, here, there, and everywhere, unequivocally asserting that Bessy Rane had been poisoned, and that her husband, Oliver Rane, had done the deed.

In good truth Mrs. North had been, if not mad, in a state of inward ferment for some short while past, ever since she had become cognisant of the expected return to England of Mr. Adair. Why she should dread this, and why it should excite her—and she did dread it and it did excite her in no measured degree—she alone knew. Nobody around her had the least idea that the coming home of Mr. Adair would be more to her than the

arrival of any stranger might be. Restless, nervous, anxious, with an evil and crafty look in her eyes, with ears that were ever open, with hands that could not be still, waited Madam. The household saw nothing—only that her tyranny became more unbearable day by day.

It almost seemed as though she seized upon the whispered accusation of Dr. Rane as a vent for some of her uneasiness on this other score to exercise itself upon. He must be brought to the bar of justice to answer for his crime, avowed Madam. She drove to the houses of the different county magistrates, urging this view upon them ; she besieged the county coroner in his office, and bade him get the necessary authority and issue his orders for the exhumation of the body.

The coroner was Mr. Dale. There had recently been a sharp contest for the coronership (which had become vacant) between a doctor and a lawyer : the latter was Dale, of Whitborough, and he had gained the day. To say that Madam, swooping down upon him with this command, startled him considerably, would be saying little, as describing his state of astonishment. Occupied very

much just now with the proceedings attaching to his new honour, and the accounts it personally involved him in (which he made many a wry face over), Lawyer Dale had found less time for gossiping about his neighbours' affairs than usual; and not a syllable of the flying rumour had reached him. So little did he at first believe it, and so badly did he think of Madam for the part she was playing, that, had she been a man, he would have given her the lie direct. But she was persistent, repeating over and over to him the charge in the most obnoxious and least delicate manner possible: Oliver Rane had poisoned his wife during her attack of fever, and he had done it to get the tontine money. She went over the grounds for suspicion, dwelling on them one by one; and perhaps the lawyer's belief in Dr. Rane's innocence was just a trifle shaken—which he did not acknowledge. After some sparring between them—Mr. Dale holding back from interference, she pressing it on—the coroner was obliged to admit that if a demand for an inquest were formally made to him he should have no resource but to call one. Finally he undertook to institute some private enquiries

into the matter, and see whether there were grounds to justify so extreme a course. Madam sharply replied that if there were the smallest disposition shown on his part to stifle the enquiry, she should at once cause the Secretary of State to be communicated with. And with that she swept down to her carriage.

Perhaps, of all classes of men, lawyers are most brought into contact with the crimes and follies committed by the human race. Mr. Dale had not been at all scrupulous as to what he undertook ; and many kinds of curious matters had come under his experience. Leaning back in his chair after Madam's visit, revolving this point of the story, revolving that, his opinion changed, and he came to the conclusion that, on the face of things, it did look very much as though Dr. Rane had been guilty. Lawyer Dale had no cause to wish the doctor harm ; especially the awful harm a public investigation might entail : had the choice lain with him, he would have remained quiescent, and consigned the doctor to his conscience. But he saw clearly that Mrs. North would not suffer this to be, and that it was

more than probable he would have to act.

The first move he made, in his undertaking to institute some private enquiry, was to seek an interview with Mr. Seeley. He went to it himself; the matter was of too delicate a nature to be confided to a clerk. In his questions he was reticent, after the cautious custom of a man of law, giving no clue, and intending to give none, as to why he put them; but Mr. Seeley had heard of the rumoured accusation, and spoke out freely.

“I confess that I could not quite understand the death,” he avowed; “but I do not suspect that Dr. Rane, or any one else, had any hand in it. She died naturally, as I believe. Mr. Dale, this is a horrible thing for you to bring against him.”

“I bring it!” cried Mr. Dale, “I don’t bring it; I’d rather let the doubt lie and die out. It is forced upon me.”

“Who by? These confounded scandal-mongers?”

“By Mrs. North.”

“Mrs. North!” echoed the surgeon in surprise. “You don’t mean to say the North family are taking it up.”

"I don't know about the family. Madam is ; and with a vengeance. She won't let it sleep. There is an evident animus in her mind against Dr. Rane, and she means to pursue the charge to its last extremity."

Mr. Seeley felt vexed to hear it. When these rare and grave charges are brought against one of the medical body, the rest, as a rule, would rather resent it than entertain it. And, besides, the surgeon liked Dr. Rane.

"Come ; you may as well tell me the truth," cried the lawyer, breaking the silence. " You'll have to do it publicly, I fancy."

" Mr. Dale," was the answer, " I have told you the truth according to my belief. Never a suspicion of foul play crossed my mind in regard to Mrs. Rane's death. I saw nothing to give rise to one."

" You did not see her after she died : nor for some hours before it ?"

" No."

" You think she went off naturally."

" Most certainly I think she did."

" But, look here—we lawyers have to probe opinions, you know, so excuse me. If you were to find it proved that she went

off in—in a different way, you'd not be surprised ; eh, Seeley ?”

“ I should be very much surprised.”

“ Hang it, man, don't you know what I mean ? You would not be able, from your recollection of the facts attending the case, to confute it, or to bring forward a single confronting proof to say she did not ?”

“ Well, no ; I should not be able.”

“ There's the difficulty, you see,” resumed the lawyer ; “ there's where it will lie. You believe Rane was innocent, I may believe him innocent ; but nobody possesses positive proofs of it, to bring forward, that might serve to stop the enquiry. It will have to go on as sure as fate.”

“ Cannot you stop it, Mr. Dale ?”

“ I promise you this : that I'll put as many impediments in the way of it as I can. But once I am called upon publicly to act, my own power to delay will be over.”

That was the end of the interview. It had a little strengthened the lawyer's doubts, if anything. Mr. Seeley had not seen her after death. What he was going to do next Mr. Dale did not say.

By the day following this, perhaps the only

two people accustomed to walk up and down the streets of Dallory who still remained in blissful ignorance of the trouble afloat, were Dr. Rane himself, and Richard North. Nobody had dared to mention it to *them*. Richard, however, was soon to be enlightened.

Business took him to his bankers' in Whitborough. It was of a private nature, requiring to be transacted between himself and one of the old brothers at the head of the firm. After it was over they began talking about general things, and Richard asked incidentally whether much further delay would take place in paying the tontine money to Dr. Rane.

"I am not sure that we shall be able to pay it him at all," replied Sir Thomas Ticknell.

"Why not?" asked Richard in surprise.

For answer, the old gentleman looked significantly at Richard for a short space of time, and then demanded whether he was still in ignorance of what had become the chief public topic.

Bit by bit, it all came out. The brothers Ticknell, it appeared, had heard the report quite at the first: there are never wanting kind friends to do a fellow-man an injury when they can; and somebody had hastened

to the bankers with the news. Richard North sat aghast as he listened. His sister was supposed to have come by her death unfairly! For once in his life he changed to the hue of a sick man, and his strong frame trembled. Sir Thomas made him drink a glass of old wine.

“We hear the new coroner, Dale, has got it in hand now,” remarked Sir Thomas. “I suppose there’ll be a fine public scandal.”

Recovering in some degree the shock, Richard North took his departure, and went over to Dale’s, whose offices were nearly opposite. The lawyer was there, and made no scruple of disclosing what he knew to Richard.

“It’s a pity that I’ve got to take the matter up,” said Dale. “Considering the uncertainty at present attending it—that the doctor may be innocent—considering also that it cannot bring the dead to life, and that it will be a most painful thing for old Mr. North—and for you too, Mr. Richard—I think it would be as well to let it alone.”

“But who is stirring in it?” asked Richard.

“Madam.”

“Madam! Do you mean Mrs. North?”

“To be sure I do. I don’t say but what public commotion and officious people would soon have brought it to the same issue ; but, anyway, Mrs. North has forestalled them.” And he told Richard of Madam’s visit to him.

“ You say you have been making some private enquiries,” observed Richard.

Mr. Dale nodded.

“ And what is your candid opinion ? Tell it me, Dale.”

But the lawyer hesitated to say to him, I think Dr. Rane may have been guilty. Hesitated not only because it was an unpleasant assertion to make to Dr. Rane’s brother-in-law, but also because he really had doubts whether it was so or not.

“ I hold no decided opinion as yet,” he said. “ I may not be able to form one until the post-mortem examination has taken place—”

“ You do not mean to say that they will—that they will disturb my sister !” interrupted Richard North, his eyes full of horror.

“ Why that’s the first thing they will do—if the investigation goes on at all,” cried the lawyer. “ That’s always the preliminary step. You are forgetting.”

“I suppose I am,” groaned Richard. “This has been a great shock to me. Dale, you cannot believe him guilty !”

“Well, I can’t tell ; and that’s the fact,” candidly avowed the lawyer. “There are certainly some suspicious circumstances attending the case : but, at the same time, they are only such that Dr. Rane may be able to explain satisfactorily away.”

“How have the doubts arisen ?” questioned Richard. “There were none—I suppose—at the time.”

“So far as I can at present ascertain, they have sprung from some words incautiously dropped by Fanny Jelly, the late Mrs. Cumberland’s maid. Whether Jelly saw anything at the time of Mrs. Rane’s illness to give rise to suspicion, I don’t know. I have not yet got to see her. It is necessary to go about this business cautiously, Mr. Richard North ; and Jelly, I expect, will be no willing witness.”

“Did Madam tell you this arose from Jelly ?”

“Oh dear no. Madam does not concern herself as to whence the suspicions came ; she says to me : ‘There they are, and you must

deal with them.' I got the information from my clerk, Timothy Wilks. In striving to trace the rumours back to their source, I traced them to him. Carpeting him here before me in this room, I insisted upon his telling me whence he obtained them. He answered me readily enough, 'from Jelly.' It seems Jelly was spending an evening at his aunt's, or cousin's, or grandmother's—whatever it is. I mean the wife of your time-keeper, Mr. Richard North. Wilks was present: only those three; the conversation turned upon Mrs. Rane's death, and Jelly said a few words that startled them. I quite believe that was the commencing link of the scandal."

"What can Jelly know?" exclaimed Richard dreamily.

"I can't tell. The report is, that Mrs. Rane had something wrong given to her by her husband the last day of her life: and that his object was to get the tontine money, which he could not touch while she lived. A curious thing that the husband and wife should be the two last left in that tontine!" added the lawyer: "I've said so often."

"But, even"—Richard stopped from pain

—“if this had been so, how could Jelly have learnt it?”

“Well, things come out in strange ways sometimes ; especially if they are things that ought not to see the light. I’ve noticed it. Jelly’s mistress was away, and she may have gone in to help nurse Mrs. Rane in her illness: we don’t yet know how it was.”

Richard North rose to depart. “At any rate, I do not see that it was Madam’s place to take it up and urge on an inquiry,” he remarked. “She should have left that to the discretion of my father and myself.”

“She was in a regular fever over it,” cried Mr. Dale. “She talked of sending an application to the Secretary of State. I shouldn’t wonder but what it is already gone up.”

From the lawyer’s house, Richard went direct to that of the late Mrs. Cumberland. The dusk of evening was then drawing on. As he reached the door, Miss Beverage, in her Quaker’s bonnet of dove-coloured silk, approached it from an opposite direction. Raising his hat, he asked whether he could be allowed a five minutes’ interview with Jelly. Miss Beverage, who knew Richard by sight, was very chatty and pleasant : she took him into

the drawing-room, and sent Jelly to him. And Jelly felt half inclined to faint as she shut the door, for she well knew what must be coming.

But, after some fencing with Richard's questions, Jelly gave in. He was resolute in requiring to hear all she could tell, and at length she made a clean breast of it. She related what she knew, and what she suspected, from beginning to end ; and before she had finished, a strangely soothing relief, that Richard should know it, grew up within her.

“ For I shall consider that the responsibility is now taken off my shoulders, sir,” she said. “ And perhaps it has been nothing, but this, that the ill-fated lady has wanted me to do, in coming again.”

In all the tale, the part that most struck Richard North, was Jelly’s positive and clear assertion that she had since twice seen Mrs. Rane. He was simply astounded. And, to tell the truth, he did not seek to cast ridicule or disbelief on it. Richard North was an educated and practical man of plain common sense, with no more tendency to believe in supernatural appearances than are such men in general : but his mind had been so un-

hinged since the interview with Sir Thomas Ticknell, that he almost felt inclined to admit the possibility of his sister's not resting in her grave.

He sat with his head leaning on his hand. Collecting in some degree his half-scattered senses, he strove to go over dispassionately the grounds of suspicion. But he could make nothing more of them than Dale had said. Grounds for it there certainly were, but none but what Dr. Rane might be able to explain away. Jelly drew her own deductions, and called them proofs: but Richard saw that of proofs as yet there were none.

"I've lived in mortal horror, ever since that first night, of seeing it again," said Jelly, interrupting his reverie. "Nobody can imagine, sir, what a dreadful time it has been. And when I was least thinking of it, it came the second time."

"To whom have you repeated this story of having seen her?" asked Richard.

"The first time I told Dr. Rane and Mrs. Gass. This last time I told the doctor and Mr. Seeley."

"Jelly," said Richard quietly, "there is no

proof that anything was wrong, except in your fancy."

"And the hasty manner that she was hid out of the way, sir—no woman called in to do anything for her; no soul allowed to see her!" urged Jelly. "If it wanted proof positive before, it can't be thought to want it since what Thomas Hepburn related to me."

"All that may have been done out of regard to the welfare of the living," said Richard.

Jelly gave a disbelieving sniff. To her mind it was clearer than daylight.

But at this juncture, a servant came in to know if she should bring lights. Richard took the opportunity to depart. Of what use to prolong his stay? As he went out he saw Mr. Seeley standing at his door. Richard crossed over and asked to speak with him: he knew of Dale's interview with the surgeon.

"Can Rane have been guilty of this thing, or not?" questioned Richard, when they were closeted together.

But, no. Not even here could Richard get at any decided opinion. It might have been so, or it might not, Seeley replied. For him-

self, he was inclined to think it was *not*; that Mrs. Rane's death was natural.

Leaving again, Richard paced up and down the dark road. His mind was in a tumult. He, with Seeley, could not think Dr. Rane was guilty. And, even though he were, he began to question whether it would not be better for his father's sake, for all their sakes, to let the matter lie. Richard, pursuing his natural bias, put the two aspects together, and compared them. On the one side there would be the merited punishment of Oliver Rane and vengeance on Bessy's wrongs; the other would bring a terrible amount of pain, of exposure, almost of disgrace. And Richard truly feared for the effect it might have on Mr. North. Before his walk was over, he decided that it would be infinitely best to hush the scandal up, should that be still possible.

But, for his own satisfaction, he wished to get at the truth. It seemed to him that he could hardly live in the uncertainty. Taking a rapid resolution, he approached Dr. Rane's; knocked at the door, and asked old Phillis if he could see her master.

She at once showed him into the dining-

room. Dr. Rane, weary perhaps with the cares of the day, had fallen back in his chair asleep. He sprung up at the interruption : a startled, almost frightened expression appeared in his face. Richard North could but notice it, and his heart failed him, for it seemed to speak of guilt. Phillis shut them in together.

How Richard opened the interview, he scarcely knew, and could never afterwards recal. He soon found that Dr. Rane remained as yet in total ignorance of the stir that was abroad ; and this rendered his task all the more difficult. Richard entered on the communication in the most delicate manner that the subject admitted of. Dr. Rane did not receive it kindly. He first swore a great oath, and then—his fury checked suddenly in its midst as if by some latent thought or fear—he sank back in his chair and bent his head on his breast, like a man struck dumb with tribulation.

“ I think *you* need not have given credit to this report against me, Richard North,” he presently spoke in a reproachful accent. “ But I believe you lost confidence in me a year and a half ago.”

He so evidently alluded to the anonymous letter that Richard did not affect to misunderstand him. It might be better to speak openly.

“I believe you wrote that, Rane.”

“True. I did. But not to injure your brother. I thought Alexander must be a bad man—that he must be leading Edmund North into money difficulties to serve himself. I had no cause to spare him, but the contrary, for he had injured me, was injuring me daily; and I wrote what I did to Mr. North hoping it might expose Alexander and damage him. There: you have it. I would rather have had my hand cut off”—flinging it out with emotion—“than have hurt your brother. I wished afterwards that it had been cut off first. But it was too late then.”

And because of that anonymous letter Dr. Rane knew, and Richard felt, that the accusation, now made, gathered weight. When a man has been guilty of one thing, we think it a reason why he may be guilty of another.

A silence ensued. They sat, the table between them. The room was rather dark. The lamp had a shade on it, the fire had burned low; before the large window were

stretched the sombre curtains. Richard North would have given some years of his life for this most distressing business never to have come into it.

He went on with what he had to say. Dr. Rane, motionless now, kept his hand over his face while he listened. Richard told of the public commotion ; of the unparalleled shock it had been to himself, of the worse shock he feared it might bring his father. Again there was an interruption : but Dr. Rane in speaking did not raise his face.

“ Is my personal liberty in danger ?”

“ Not yet—in one sense. I believe you are under the surveillance of the police.”

“ Watched by them ?”

“ Yes. But only to see that you do not get away.”

“ That is—they track me out and home, I am to understand ? I am watched in and out of my patients’ houses. If I have occasion to pay country visits, these stealthy bloodhounds are at my heels, night or day ?”

“ I conclude it is so,” answered Richard.

“ Since when has this been ?”

“ Since—I think since the day-before-yesterday. There is a probability, as I hear,

that the Secretary of State will be applied to.
If ——”

“ For what purpose ?”

“ For his authority to disturb the grave,” said Richard in a low tone.

Dr. Rane started up, a frenzy of fear apparent in his face.

“ They—they—surely they are not talking of doing *that* ?” he cried, turning white as death.

“ Yes, they are. To have her disturbed will be to us the most painful of all.”

“ Stop it, for the Lord’s sake !” came the imploring cry. “ Stop it, Richard North ! Stop it !”

But at that moment there burst upon their ears a frightful clatter outside the door. Richard opened it. Dr. Rane, who had sunk on his seat again, never stirred. Old Phillis, coming in from the scullery after a cleaning bout, had accidentally let fall nearly a small cart-loadful of pots and pans.

CHAPTER X.

“EST-CE QU’IL M’AIME ?”

WINTRY weather set in again. The past few days had been intensely cold and bleak. Ellen Adair sat in one of her favourite out-door seats. Well-sheltered from the wind by artificial rocks and clustering evergreens, and well wrapped-up besides, she did not seem to feel the frost.

Her later days had been one long great trial. Compelled to meet Arthur Bohun perpetually, yet shunned by him as far as it was possible for him to shun her without attracting too much the observation of others, there were times when she felt as though her position at the Hall were killing her. Something, in fact, *was* killing her. Her state of mind was a mixture of despair, shame, and self-reproach. Captain Bohun’s conduct brought

to her the bitterest humiliation. Looking back on the past, she thought he despised her for her ready acquiescence in that wish of his for a private marriage : and the self-repentance, the humiliation it entailed on her was of all things the hardest to bear. She almost felt that she could die of the memory—just as other poor creatures, whose sin has been different, have died of their shame. To her mistaken vision, it seemed as though the wrong deed she had consented to—the secret marriage—were quite as much of a shame if not of a sin. The view presented perpetually to her mind was, that Captain Bohun so regarded it ; and had nothing for her but scorn. This was the thought that tried her, that embittered her peace by night and by day : it was doing her more harm than all the rest. Her cheeks would redden, her fingers tingle with shame as she recalled that fond letter she had written to him from Eastsea, when even then, though she did not know it, he had given her up. To one so sensitively organised as Ellen Adair, reared in all the graces of reticent and refined feeling, this compelled sojourn at Dallory Hall could indeed be nothing less than a fiery ordeal, from

which there might be no escape to former health and strength.

Very still she sat to-day, nursing her pain. Her face was wan, her breathing short: that past cold she had caught seemed to hang by her strangely. No further news had been received from Mr. Adair, and Ellen supposed he was on his way home. After to-day, her position would not be quite so trying, for Arthur Bohun was quitting Dallory. Sir Nash had decided that he was strong enough now to travel; and they were to depart together at two o'clock. It was past twelve now. And so—the sunshine of Ellen Adair's life had gone out. Never, as she believed, would a gleam come into it again.

In spite of the commotion beyond the walls of the Hall, now increasing daily and hourly to a climax, in spite of Madam's never-resting personal exertions to urge it on, and to crush Oliver Rane, no word of the dreadful accusation had as yet transpired within to its chief inmates. Mr. North, his daughter Matilda, Ellen Adair, Sir Nash Bohun, and Arthur; all were alike in ignorance. The servants of course knew of it, going out to Dallory, as they often did: but Madam had issued her

sharp orders to them to hold their tongues ; and Richard had begged them not to speak of it for their master’s sake. As to Sir Nash and Arthur Bohun, Richard was only too glad that they should depart without hearing the scandal.

He himself was doing all he could to stop proceedings and allay excitement. Since the night of his interviews with Jelly, Mr. Seeley, and Dr. Rane, Richard had devoted his best energies to the work of suppression. He did not venture to see any official person, the coroner excepted, or impress his views on the magistrates ; but he went about amid the populace, and poured oil on the troubled waters. “For my father’s sake, do not press this on,” he said to them ; “let my sister’s grave rest.”

“Just like Dick North,” quoth they, one to another. “He was always for peace.”

In effect he said the same to the coroner ; begging of him, if possible, to stop it ; and he implied to all, though not absolutely asserting it, that Dr. Rane could not be guilty. So that Ellen Adair, sitting there, had not this knowledge to give her additional trouble.

A little blue leaf—as it looked—suddenly

caught her eye, peeping up from a mossy and tangled green nook, at the foot of the rocks. She rose, and stooped to see. It was a winter violet. Plucking it, she sat down again, and fell into thought.

For it had brought vividly before her memory, that long-past day, when she had played out her play of violets in the garden at Mrs. Cumberland's. "Est-ce qu'il m'aime ? Oui. Non. Un peu. Beaucoup. Pas du tout. Passionnément. *Il m'aime passionnément.*" False augurs, those flowers had been ! Deceitful blossoms which had combined to mock and sting her. The contrast between that time and this brought to Ellen Adair a whole flood-tide of intense misery. And those foolish violets were hidden away still ! Should she carry this in-doors and add it to them ?

By-and-bye she began to walk towards the house. Turning a corner presently she was brought suddenly to the midst of three excited people : Captain Bohun, Miss Dallory, and Matilda North. The two former had met accidentally in the walk. Miss Dallory's morning errand at the Hall was to say good-bye to Sir Nash ; and before she and Captain Bohun had well exchanged greetings, Matilda bore down

upon them in a state of agitation, calling wildly to Arthur to stay and hear the tidings *she* had just heard.

The tidings were those that had been so marvellously long kept from her and from others at the Hall—the accusation of Dr. Rane. Matilda North had just learnt them in an accidental manner: in her horror and surprise she had run after her half-brother, Arthur, to repeat the story. Ellen Adair found her talking in wild excitement. Arthur, rather yellow still, was turning to a pale straw colour as he listened; Mary Dallory, to whom it was no news, had covered up her face.

But Arthur Bohun and Matilda North were strong enough to bear it without any very palpable effect. Ellen Adair was not. As she drank in the meaning of the dreadful words—that Bessy had been murdered—a deadly sickness seized upon her heart; and she had only time to sit down on a garden bench before she fainted away.

“You should not have told it so abruptly, Matilda,” cried Arthur, almost passionately. “It has made even me feel ill. Get some water: you’ll go quicker than I should.”

Alarmed at Ellen's state, and eager to be of service, both Matilda and Miss Dallory ran in search of the water. Arthur Bohun sat down on the bench to support her. His path in life was to lie that way, and hers this, the further apart the better ; but he could not in humanity—no, nor in love either—walk away now and leave her to recover alone as she best could.

Her head lay on his breast, as he placed it. She was entirely without consciousness : he saw that. His arm encircled her waist ; he took one of her lifeless hands between his, to rub it. Thus he sat, gazing down at the pale thin face so near to his ; the face which he—he—had helped to rob of its bloom.

Oh, but he loved her still ! loved her better than he did all the rest of the world put together ! Holding her there to his beating heart, he knew it. He knew that he only loved her the more truly for their bitter estrangement. His frame was trembling, his pulses were thrilling with the rapture this momentary contact brought him. If he might but embrace her, as of old ! Should he ? Why not ? No human soul, save himself, would ever know it. A strangely irrepressible

yearning, to touch her lips with his, came into his eyes and heart. Glancing keenly around first, lest any prying eyes should be in ambush, he slightly lifted the pale sweet face, and bent down his own.

“Oh, my darling ! My lost darling !”

Lips, cheeks, brow were kissed again and again, with a soft impassioned tenderness, with a kind of hungry rapture. It was so long since he had touched them ! Was he ever going to leave off ? A sigh—more than one—escaped him ; a little sound of irrepressible emotion : and he knew not whether it contained most of bliss or of agony.

This treatment was quite effective ; more so than the water could have been. Ellen drew a deep breath, and stirred uneasily. As soon as she began really to revive, he managed to get his coat off and fold it across the head and arm of the bench. When Ellen awoke to consciousness, she had her head leaning on it ; and Captain Bohun stood at a very respectful distance, gingerly chafing one of her hands. Never a suspicion crossed her mind of what he had been doing.

“ You are better,” he said, “ I am so glad !”

The words, in *his* voice, aroused her fully. She lifted her head and opened her eyes, and gazed around her in bewilderment, at first remembering nothing. But what Matilda had said came back with a rush.

"Is it true?" she exclaimed, looking pitifully at him. "It never can be true!"

"I don't know," he answered. "If false, it is almost as dreadful to us who hear it. Poor Bessy! I loved her as my very dear sister."

Ellen, exhausted by the fainting fit, her nerves unstrung by the news, burst into a flood of distressing tears. Matilda and Miss Dallory running up with water, wine, and smelling-salts, found her sobbing aloud.

"It is the reaction after the faintness," said Captain Bohun to them in a whisper.

But she soon recovered her equanimity, so far as outward calmness went, without the aid of any of the remedies—which she declined. Rising from the bench, she turned towards the house. Her steps tottered a little.

"Do give your arm to support Miss Adair, Captain Bohun," spoke Mary Dallory in a sharp quick tone, surprised perhaps that he did not. And upon that, Captain Bohun went to Ellen's side, and held it out.

“Thank you,” she answered, and refused it with a slight movement of the head.

They walked on at first all in a group, as it were. But Matilda and Miss Dallory got far ahead, the former talking in a most excited state about Bessy Rane and the miserable accusation in regard to her. Ellen’s steps were slower; which she could not help; and Captain Bohun kept by her side.

“May I wish you good-bye here, Ellen?” he suddenly asked, stopping towards the end of the shrubbery, through which they had been passing.

“Good-bye,” she faintly answered.

He took her hand. That is, he held out his own, and Ellen almost mechanically put hers into it. To have made a to-do, by refusing, would have hurt her pride worse than all. He kept it within his, clasping his other hand upon it. For a moment his eyes met hers.

“It may be, that we shall never again cross each other’s path in life, Ellen. God bless you, my love, and keep you always! I wish to heaven, for both our sakes, that we had never met!”

“Good-bye,” she coldly repeated as he

dropped her hand. And they walked on in silence and gained the lawn, where the two in advance had turned to wait for them.

But this was destined to be an eventful day : to others, at least, if not to them. At the appointed time, Sir Nash Bohun and Arthur took their departure ; Richard North, who had paid the baronet the attention of coming home to luncheon—for there was no concealment now as to who was the true host at Dallory Hall—seeing them into their carriage.

“ You have promised to come and stay with me, Richard,” said the baronet, at the last hand-shake.

“ Conditionally. When my work shall allow me leisure,” answered Richard, laughing.

“ Can’t you go with us to the station, Dick ?” put in Arthur.

“ Not to-day, I fear. I must hold an immediate interview with Madam—something important. If you waited for me you might lose the train.”

Arthur bent his face—one of pain now—close to Dick’s, and whispered.

“ Is it money-trouble again, Richard ?”

"No ; not this time."

"If she brings *that* on you in future, turn her over to me. Yes, Richard : I must deal with it now."

Farewells were exchanged, and the carriage drove away. Richard, stepping backwards, trod on Miss Dallory.

"I beg your pardon !" he exclaimed. "Have I hurt you ? I did not know you were there."

"Of course you have not hurt me : and I had no business to be there. I stood to wave my handkerchief to them. Good afternoon, Mr. Richard."

"Are you going ?" he asked.

"I am engaged to spend the afternoon and take tea with Mrs. Gass. That luncheon was my dinner. I saw you looking at me as if you thought I eat a great deal."

"Miss Dallory !"

She laughed slightly.

"To confess the truth, I don't think I noticed whether you eat anything or nothing," said Richard. "I have a great deal of trouble on my mind just now—of more kinds than one. Good afternoon."

He would be returning to Dallory himself

in perhaps a few minutes, but he never said to her "Stay, and I will walk with you." Miss Dallory thought of it as she went away. It had indeed crossed Richard's mind to say so : but he arrested the words as they were about to leave his lips. If she was to be Arthur Bohun's wife, the less Richard saw of her the better.

Enquiring for Madam when he went indoors, he found she was ensconced in her boudoir. Richard went up, knocked at the door, and opened it. Madam appeared not to approve of the procedure ; she bore down on him with a swoop, and would have shut him out.

"What do you want here, Richard North ? I am not at liberty. I cannot admit you."

"Pardon me, Madam, I must speak with you for five minutes," he answered, passing quietly in.

By something he had heard that morning from Dale, Richard had reason to suppose that Mrs. North was still actively pursuing the charge against Dr. Rane ; that is, was urging in high quarters the imperative necessity for an investigation. Richard had come to ask her whether this was the case,

and to beg her, once for all, to be still. He sat down uninvited while he put the question.

But Madam acknowledged nothing. In fact, she led him to believe that it was entirely untrue ; that she had not stirred in it at all since the caution Richard had given her, not to, some days ago. It was simply impossible for him to know whether what she said might be depended on—for she told more falsehood than truth habitually. Richard could only hope.

“It would be a terrible exposure for us,” he urged. “Madam, I beg you ; I beg you for all our sakes, be *still*. You know not what you would do.”

She nodded an ungracious acquiescence : and Richard departed for his works, casually mentioning to Mr. North, as he passed him in the garden, that he should not be home until night. Like Miss Dallory, he had intended the mid-day meal to serve for his dinner.

“Dick,” cried Mr. North, arresting him, “what’s the matter with Matilda ? She seems to be in a fine commotion over something or other.”

Richard knew not what to answer. If his father had to be told, why better that he himself should be the teller. There was still a chance that it might be kept from him.

“Something or other gone wrong, I suppose, sir. Never mind. How well those new borders look !”

“Don’t they, Dick ! I’m glad I had them put.”

And Richard went on to his works.

CHAPTER XI.

A FINE NIGHT'S WORK.

NIIGHT had fallen. And it was not a bright or pleasant one..

Some few skulkers had gathered behind the dwarf hedge, that skirted the piece of waste land near the North Works. An ill-looking lot of men, seen as at present: for they had knelt down so as to bring themselves nearly on a level with the top of the hedge. Their eyes just cleared it, and the view beyond was not interrupted. Poole was in the middle; his face sternly savage, and a pistol in his right hand.

Of all the men who had returned to work, the most obnoxious to the ex-hands was one named Ralley. It was not so much because he had been a turn-coat—that is, after holding out to the eleventh moment, had finally gone back at the twelfth—that the men hated

him, as because they believed him to be treacherous. Ralley had been red-hot for the strike ; had done more by his agitation than any one man to bring it about. He had resolutely refused all the overtures made by Richard North : and yet—he had gone back when the works were finally re-opened. For this the men heartily despised him—far more than they did those who had been ready to go back all along. In addition to this, they had been suspecting—and lately had felt sure—that he was a snake in the grass. That he had laid himself out to pick up, fairly or stealthily, as might be, bits of information about them, their doings and sayings, their miserable condition, and threats of revenge, and carried them to the works and to Richard North. And so—the contents of this pistol, that Poole held in his hand, were meant for Ralley.

For a long time the malcontents of North Inlet had been burning to take vengeance on somebody : some new treachery on Ralley's part, or suspected treachery, had come to light, and they determined to shoot *him*. Oh, poor, misguided, foolish men ! As if it would make things better for them ! Suppose they

killed Ralley, how would it ease their condition? Ralley had not suffered half what they suffered. He was an unmarried man; and, during the strike, he had been helped by his relatives, who were pretty well off, so that he had known neither starvation nor rags, as they had: and this made his returning to work look all the worse in their eyes. Ralley was about the age of Richard North, and not unlike him in height and figure: so much like him, indeed, that since their evil act had been determined on, one of the others had bade Poole take care he did not mistake the master for him. Poole's sullen rejoinder was, that 'twould not much matter if he did.

The night was dark; a drizzling rain had come on, and that part was not too well lighted. The small band, about to issue from the gates of the works, would come down by this waste land and pass within some fifteen yards of them. Poole had been a famous marksman in his day, and felt sure of his aim. John Allen knelt at his right hand, one Denton at the other; another beyond on either side: five in all.

Five o'clock struck. Almost simultaneously with it was heard the bell at the works,

giving token that it was time for the men to go to tea. Three or four sharp, quick strokes : nothing more.

“ That’s Green, I’ll swear,” cried Denton, alluding to the ringer. “ I didn’t know he was back again : his rheumatics must be better.”

“ Hush—sh—sh !” was all Denton got. And there ensued a death-like silence. Not for long. Poole broke it.

“ Where the devil are they ?—why don’t they come ?”

Ay, why did they not come ? Simply because there had been scarcely sufficient time for it. But every moment, to these would-be murderers, kneeling there, seemed like a long drawn-out period.

“ Here they be,” whispered Denton.

It was so. The men were coming out at the gate, about twenty of them ; two and two ; the policemen to-night heading the string. At times the officers were behind it, at other times on either side. Poole rose cautiously and prepared to take aim. They were coming across from the gates at a kind of right angle, and presently would pass the hedge, side-ways. This was the second night

the men had thus lain in ambush. The previous one they had alike waited ; but Ralley happened to be then on the other side his companion in the march, and so for the time was saved.

Allen stretched his head up. His sight was as keen as a sailor's.

"Which side's he on, Jack ?" whispered Poole. "I don't see him yet."

For answer John Allen put his hand quickly on Poole's arm to lower the pistol. "No good again, mates," said he. "Ralley ain't there."

"Not there !" retorted Poole with a vile oath.

"I'm as nigh sure as I can be of it," said Allen. "Wait till they come nearer."

It proved to be so. Ralley for some cause or other was not with the men.

"Rat him !" cried Denton, furiously.

Tramp, tramp, tramp : their tread sounded regular in the stillness of the night as they passed, the policemen throwing their eyes on all sides. Poole had crouched down again. He and his companions in evil kept very still : it would not do to let either movement be seen, or noise be heard.

The steps died away in the distance, and the conspirators ventured to raise their heads. Allen happened to look in the direction of the gates.

“By Jorkins here he is!” burst forth Allen almost with a scream. “Something kept him back. Now’s our time, mates. Here’s Ralley.”

“That ain’t his hat, Jack Allen,” dissented one.

“Hat be smothered! it’s *him*,” said John Allen.

Ralley was coming on very quickly, a dark, low-crowned hat drawn down on his brows. A minute’s silence, during which you might have heard their hearts beat, and then——

Poole fired. Ralley gave a cry; staggered, and walked on. He was struck, no doubt, but not killed.

“Your boasted aim has failed, Poole,” cried Denton with a savage oath.

Not more savage than Poole’s, though, as he burst through, or over, the low hedge. What the bullet had not done, the pistol itself should. Suddenly, with a shriek and a cry, Allen burst after him, shouting to him to stay his hand.

“ It's the master, Poole ; it's not Ralley. Stop, you fool !—it's the master.”

Too late. It was, indeed, Richard North. And Mr. Poole had felled him by a wicked blow on the temple.

Mrs. Gass and Mary Dallory were seated at tea in a subdued mood—for the conversation had turned on those dreadful rumours that, in spite of Richard North, could not be hushed, but on the contrary were growing worse hourly. Stoutly was Mrs. Gass asserting that she had more faith in Dr. Rane than to believe them, when some commotion dawned on their ears from the street. Mrs. Gass stopped in the midst of a sentence.

“ What's that ?” she cried.

Fleet steps seemed to be running hither and thither ; voices were raised in excitement. They distinctly heard the words, “ Mr. Richard,” “ Richard North.” Mrs. Gass drew aside her crimson curtains, and opened the window.

“ Here—is it you, Smith ?” she said, arresting a man who was running in the wake of others. “ What is it ? What's up ?”

“ I don't rightly know, ma'am,” he answered.

“They are saying that Mr. Richard North has been shot dead.”

“Lord help us!” cried Mrs. Gass. She shut down the window and brought her face round to the light again. Every bit of colour had gone out of it. Mary Dallory stood rigidly upright, her hands clasped, still as one who has been turned into stone.

“Did you hear what he said, child?”

“I heard,” was the scarcely spoken answer that the lips formed.

Mrs. Gass caught up a bonnet, which happened to lie on a chair, tilted it on her head, and went into the street. At the entrance to North Inlet a crowd was gathered, men and women. As in all such cases, reports varied. Some said it had taken place in the high road to Whitborough, some said at the works, some said near Dallory Hall. So the mob was puzzled which way to go and not miss the sight. Thoms was talking at the top of his voice as Mrs. Gass got up; anxious, perhaps, to disclaim complicity on his own score.

“They’ve had it in their heads to do it, some o’ them bad uns have. I could name names, but I won’t. If the master had

knowed all, he'd ha' went about in fear of his life this long while past."

This was enough for Mrs. Gass. Gathering her black silk skirts in her hands that they should not trail in the mud, her bonnet lodged sideways, and her face paler than the assemblage had ever seen it, she stood, unmindful of the rain, and told them what she thought.

"If you've shot Richard North you have shot the best and bravest man you'll ever know in this life. You'll never find such a friend again. Oh, he was brave. Brave to do good in the midst o' difficulties, brave to forbear. Don't *you* boast, Thoms, with your glib tongue. None of you men round me now may be the one that's shot him, but you've been all rowing in the same boat. Yes, you have. You mayn't have planned out murder yourselves—I'd not answer for it that you've not—but, any way, you knowed that others was a-planning it, and you winked at it and held your tongues. Who has been the friend to you that Richard North has? Since you've been part starving and your wives and children's been part starving, where has all the help come from, d'ye suppose, that

has kept you from starving quite? Why, from him. The most of it has come from him. The money I gave was his, the things I bought was mostly paid for by him. A little of it came from me, not much; I was too angry with your folly; but he couldn't see you quite clam, and he took care you shouldn't. Look at how you were all helped through the fever; and meat, and bread, and beer gave to you to get up your strength a bit, after it! Who did all that? Why Richard North. You thought it was me; but it was him: only he wouldn't have it known. That was his return for all the black ingratitude you'd showed, in refusing to work for him and bringing him to ruin. Pray God he may not be dead! but if he is, there's a good man gone to his reward. Is that you, Ketlar?"

"Yes, it's me," answered Ketlar, who was standing in the shadow, a worse gloom on his face than the night cast.

"When that child of yours died, Cissy—and many a little help did she get in life from him—who took care that she shouldn't be buried by the parish but Richard North? He met Fanny Jelly, and he put some money

into her hand, and charged her to let it be thought it was *hers*. ‘They are in great distress, I know, Jelly,’ he said; ‘let this be used in any way that’s best for them.’ Go and ask Jelly, if you don’t believe me; I had it from her. And that’s the master you’ve been conspirating together to help to kill, Ketlar!’

Ketlar swallowed down a rising sob. “I’d never have raised a hand again the master; no, nor countenanced it. If anybody has said I would, it’s a lie.”

“There’s not one of you but knew what mischief was in the wind, or might have knew it; and you’ve countenanced it by keeping silence,” retorted Mrs. Gass. “You are a pack of cowards. First of all you ruin him by throwing up his work, and when you find yourselves all a-clamming together, or nigh upon it, you turn round on him and kill him. May the Lord forgive you! I never will.”

Some disturbance. A tramping of feet, and a shouting of running boys. Mrs. Gass was pushed aside with others to make way for the cause of interruption passing. Poole, Denton, John Allen, and one more, were

marching by in handcuffs, marshalled by some policemen. A telling hiss greeted them.

“ ‘Twas a mistake,” said Jack Allen, in answer to the hiss, reckless under his untoward fate. “ ‘Twas meant for Ralley, not for the master.”

“ Is he dead ?” called out Mrs. Gass.

But amidst the confusion she got no answer. And at that moment she became aware of a pale countenance near her, peeping out from a muffling of wool.

“ Good gracious, Mary, child ! You shouldn’t be out here.”

“ I have been with you all the while.”

“ Then, my dear, you just betake yourself home again. I’ll come in as soon as I can learn the truth, and where he is.”

Mrs. Gass had not long to wait. Almost as she spoke, Richard North appeared : and thereupon ensued more excitement than ever. Blood was trickling from his temple, but he appeared quite sensible, and was walking slowly, helped by two men.

“ Thank God !” said Mrs. Gass aloud : and the words were heartily echoed. “ To my house, men. Mr. Richard, sir, it is but a few

steps more, and we'll soon get the doctor. A fine night's work, this is!" she concluded, not speaking in reference to the weather, but to the "work."

Little Barrington, the druggist, came out of his shop, and helped to put Richard on Mrs. Gass's sofa. They got his coat off. The left arm was injured, as well as the temple. Barrington staunched the blood, trickling from the latter; but the arm he preferred not to meddle with. "He had better be kept quite quiet, until the surgeon comes," said the druggist to Mrs. Gass.

Mrs. Gass cleared the room. About fifty excited messengers had run to the Ham for Mr. Seeley or Dr. Rane, or both if they should be found at home. She stood at the front door, looking out and waiting.

Richard North, three parts in a faint, lay with his eyes closed. Opening them in the still room, he saw Mary Dallory kneeling by the sofa, pale and sad. He smiled faintly, and her tears began to drop.

"Don't be alarmed," he whispered. "It might have been worse."

"I would have given my life to save yours, Richard," she impetuously exclaimed in the

delirium of the moment. And, leaning forward, the tears fell now on his face.

His right hand went out a little and hers met it.

“Richard, I wish I might stay and nurse you. You have no sister,” she added, as an after-thought. “Matilda is useless in a sick-room.”

Richard North nervously pressed her fingers. “Don’t try me too much, Mary. I am caring for you already more than is good for my peace. Don’t tempt me.”

“And if I were to tempt you?—Though I don’t quite take the meaning,” she rejoined, softly and nervously. “What then?”

“I might say what I ought not.” And there he paused.

“It would make it all the harder for me,” he continued. “I am a man of the people; a man of work. You will belong to—to one of a different order.”

She knew he alluded to Arthur Bohun, and laughed slightly. But, though she said no more, she left her hand in his, their fingers entwining together. Richard thought it was done solely in compassion.

And now there was a bustle heard, and in came Mr. Seeley, his face hot with running. The hands parted, and Mary Dallory went round to the other side of the table, standing there in decorum.

CHAPTER XII.

DISTURBING THE GRAVE.

BY twos and threes, by fours and fives, by tens and by dozens, the curious and excited groups were wending their way to Dallory churchyard. For a certain work was going on there, which had never been performed in it within the memory of the oldest inhabitant.

Richard North was lying at Dallory Hall, incapacitated. When Mr. Seeley—assisted by Dr. Rane, who came in—examined into his injuries at Mrs. Gass's, he pronounced them not to be grave. The bullet had struck a fleshy part of the arm, and passed off from it, leaving a wound. Care and rest only would be necessary to heal it ; and the same might be said with regard to the blow on the temple. Perfect quiet was essential, perfect rest, to

guard against any after consequences. Mrs. Gass wished Richard to stay at her house and be nursed through it ; but he thought of the trouble it would cause in her regular household, and said he preferred to be taken home. It was Mr. Seeley who continued to attend him by Richard's own wish : not Dr. Rane. The public thought the rejection of the latter ominously significant, in spite of Richard's recent exertions to do away with the impression of his guilt.

“Understand : absolute quiet both of body and mind,” enjoined Mr. Seeley, not only to Richard himself but to the family and servants. “If you have that, Mr. Richard, you will be about again in a short time : if you do not have it, I cannot undertake to answer for the result.”

But Richard North, with his good common sense, was an obedient patient. He knew how necessary it was, if only for his recommenced business, that he should not long be laid by, and he kept as quiet as Mr. Seeley could wish. No stranger was allowed to disturb him ; none of the household presumed to carry him the smallest particle of news, public or domestic.

It was during this confinement of Richard's that Ellen Adair received her summons for departure. Her father had arrived in London, and wrote to Mrs. Cumberland—all unconscious of that lady's death—begging that she and Ellen would join him there. He apologized to Mrs. Cumberland for not coming to Dallory, but said that family business required his presence in London. Mr. North at first proposed to take Ellen up himself: but he was really not fit; and it was decided that Parrit, Madam's maid, should attend her thither.

Ellen was allowed to go in and bid good-bye to Richard before her departure. She burst into tears as she strove to thank him for his kindness.

“ You must come and see papa as soon as you are well enough, Richard. When I tell him how kind you have been, he will want to see and thank you.”

“ Good-bye, my dear,” said Richard, releasing her hand. “ I trust you will soon get up all your good spirits again, now your father has come.”

She smiled faintly: it was not on her father—so imperfectly, if at all, remembered—that

her spirits depended. As Ellen was passing through the hall to enter the carriage that would take her to the station, she found herself touched by Madam, and drawn into the dining-room.

“ You have not seemed very happy with us, Miss Adair. But I have tried to make you so.”

“ Yes, Madam, I am sure you have ; and I thank you very much,” returned Ellen gratefully—for Madam really did appear to have been most kind to her of late. “ I trust papa will have an opportunity of thanking you and Mr. North personally.”

Madam coughed. “ If you think I deserve thanks, I wish you would do me a slight favour in return.”

“ If I can. Certainly.”

“ Some years ago when we were in India,” proceeded Madam, “ my late husband, Major Bohun, and your father were acquainted with each other. Some unpleasant circumstances took place between them : a quarrel, in fact. Major Bohun considered he was injured ; Mr. Adair thought it was himself who was. It was altogether very painful, and I would not for the world have that old matter raked up

again ; it would cost me too much pain. Will you, then, guard from Mr. Adair's knowledge that I, Mrs. North, am she who was once Mrs. Bohun."

"Yes, I will," said Ellen in the hasty impulse of the moment, without pausing to consider whether circumstances would allow her to do so.

"You promise me this."

"Yes, certainly. I will never speak of it to him, Madam."

"Thank you, my dear." And Madam kissed her, and took her out arm in arm to the carriage.

Day by day Richard North never failed to question the surgeon in a whisper, whether there was anything fresh arising in regard to the accusation against Dr. Rane. The answer was invariably No. In point of fact, Mr. Seeley, not hearing more of it himself, supposed there was not : and at length, partly in good faith, partly to calm his patient, who was restless on the subject, he said it had dropped through.

Had it ! During Richard's active opposition, Madam had found her hands somewhat crippled ; for she scarcely deemed it might be

altogether to her own interest at the Hall to set him at defiance : but the moment he was laid up, she was at work again more actively than ever. It was nothing but a Providence, Madam considered, that had put Richard out of the way for a time : and could Madam have released Poole from the consequences of his act, and sent him on his road rewarded, she had certainly done it. She gained her point. Poor Mrs. Rane was to be taken up from her grave.

Dale, who had it in hand, went about the proceedings as quietly and secretly as possible. He was sorry to have to do it, for he bore no ill-will to Richard North, but the contrary, and he knew how anxious he was that this should not be done ; while at the same time the lawyer hated Madam. But, he had no choice : he had received his orders, as coroner, to call an inquest, and could not evade it. He issued his instructions in private, strictly charging the few, who must act, to keep silence abroad. And not a syllable transpired beforehand.

The work was commenced in the dark of the winter's morning. By ten o'clock, however, the men had been seen in the church-

yard, and secrecy was no longer possible. Like wild-fire ran the news to all parts of Dallory—Mrs. Rane was being taken up. Never had there been excitement akin to this. People rushed about like maniacs. They made nothing of knocking at the doors of others who were strangers to them, and leaving the tidings: the street was in an uproar, the windows were alive with heads: had Dallory suddenly found itself invaded by a destroying army, the commotion could not have been greater.

Oh, then began the exodus to the church-yard. It was as though strings of pilgrims were flocking to a shrine. Mr. Dale had foreseen this probability, and was prepared. A body of police appeared in the churchyard, and the pilgrims found they could not approach the actual spot beyond the limits of a respectful distance. Naturally resenting this, they relieved their feelings by loud talking.

Jelly was there. Never nearer losing her reason than now. Between dismay at what she had set afloat, and horror at the crime about to be revealed, Jelly was not clear whether she stood on her head or her heels.

When the news was carried to her of what was going on, Jelly nearly fainted. Now that it had come to the point, she felt that she would have given the world never to have meddled with it. It was not so much of the responsibility to herself that she thought, as of the dreadful aspect of the thing altogether. She went into a fit of trembling, and ran into her chamber to hide it: when somewhat recovered, she asked leave of Mrs. Beverage to be allowed to go out for a few hours. To have been compelled to remain in-doors would have driven her quite mad. The morning was getting late when Jelly arrived at the scene, and the first person she particularly noticed there was Mrs. Gass.

But Mrs. Gass had not come forth in idle curiosity as most others had done—and there were some superior people, in regard to station, amidst the mob. Mrs. Gass was inexpressibly shocked and dismayed that it should really have come to this. Oliver Rane was her late husband's nephew; she truly did not think he could have been guilty; and she had hastened to the spot to see whether any argument or persuasion might avail at this, the twelfth hour, to arrest pro-

ceedings and spare this disgrace to the North and Gass families.

But no. But no. Stepping over the barrier-line that the police had drawn, without the smallest regard to the remonstrance of a red-faced inspector, who was directing things, Mrs. Gass approached the small throng around the grave. She might have spared herself the pains. In answer to her urgent appeal she was told that nobody here had any power now; it was gone out of their hands. In getting back, crestfallen, Mrs. Gass encountered Jelly.

“Well,” said she, regarding Jelly sternly, “be you satisfied with your work?”

Jelly never answered. In her shame, her regret, her humiliation at what she had done, she could almost have wished herself labouring at some expiating treadmill.

“Any way, girl, you might have had the decency to keep away,” went on Mrs. Gass.

“I couldn’t,” said Jelly meekly. “I couldn’t stop at home, and bear it.”

“Then I’d have gone a mile or two the tother way,” retorted Mrs. Gass. “You’ve got a face of your own—to show it here. And a conscience too.”

A frightful noise interrupted them : something between a shout and a yell. The heavy coffin was at length deposited on the ground with the tired pick-axes beside it, and the populace were expressing their mixed sentiments at the sight : some in a round of applause at this great advance in the show : others in a condemnatory groan of scorn meant for him who had caused it—Dr. Rane. Mrs. Gass, what with the yelling, and what with the coffin and pick-axes, and what with the crush, had never felt so cruelly humiliated in all her days ; and she retired behind a remote tree to hide her face of pain.

“ Where is he, the murderer ? Why don’t he come and look on at his poor victim ? She’ll soon be open to sight. The crowner ought to uncuff him and haul him here.—Rabbit them watchful perlice ! They’ve got eyes behind ‘em. They wants to be blowed up with a can o’ powder. Look at old Jekyll there and his red face !—Ugh ! the poisoner ! What had poor Bessy North done to him, that he should put her in there ! The lead’s thick enough ! it’ll take time to open *that*. Bones ! Blood ! Fire !”

These sentences, amidst many others, pene-

trated to Mrs. Gass's ears. Just then Thomas Hepburn appeared in sight, his face very sad and pale.

"Hepburn," said Mrs. Gass, "I can't think they'll find anything wrong in there. My belief is she died natural. Unless there were better grounds to go upon than I know of, they ought not to have gone to this shameful length."

"Ma'am, I don't think it, either," assented the man. "I'm sure it has been more like a dream to me than anything else, since I heard it. Folks say it is Madam at the Hall that has forced it on."

Had Mrs. Gass been a man, she might have felt tempted to give Madam a very strong word. What right had she, in her ill-conditioned malice, to inflict this pain on others?

"Whatever may be the upshot of this, Thomas Hepburn, it will come home to her as sure as that we two be talking here. What are you going there for?" added Mrs. Gass, for he was preparing to make his way towards the open grave.

"I've had orders to be here, ma'am. Some of those law officials don't understand this sort of work as well as I do."

He crossed over, the police making way for him, Inspector Jekyll giving him a nod. Jelly was standing not far from Mrs. Gass, leaning her forehead against a tree, as she strained her eyes to look on. By the eagerness displayed by the crowd, and the difficulty there was in keeping them back, it might have been supposed they thought that they had only to get to see the face of the dead body, lying within, to have all suspicion of Dr. Rane turned into fact.

The work went on. Now during an interval of almost breathless silence; now amidst a half-suppressed roar. Suddenly, a frightful report was whispered from one to another; though who first spoke it, or whence it arose, none could discover—that their righteous curiosity was not to be gratified. That as soon as the shell should be disinterred from the leaden coffin, it was to be taken away unopened with what it contained.

Unopened! would they stand this? Were they Englishmen, and should a miserable jackanapes-at-law (meant for Dale) treat them in this way. Had not Bessy North grown amidst them, and would they not see justice done her? No, no; they had not come here

to be cheated. They'd look on her if they died for it.

The leaden covering came off amidst a tumult, and the common deal shell alone remained now. So determined were the mob, so threatening grew their aspect and movements—and it was a pretty formidable mob now, as to numbers—that a timorous old magistrate, who was present, left the grave ; and, putting up his hands for a hearing, assured them that the shell was to be opened, and should be opened, there on the ground.

It was at this juncture that another spectator came slowly up—although it might have been supposed that the whole of Dallory was already there. The mob, their excited faces turned to the old magistrate and to Thomas Hepburn, who was already at work, did not see his approach. Which was perhaps as well : for it was Dr. Rane.

Even from him had these proceedings been kept secret, perhaps especially from him ; and it was only now, upon coming forth to visit a patient in Dallory, that he learnt what was taking place in the churchyard. He came to it at once : his countenance was stern, his face whiter than death.

Mrs. Gass saw him ; Jelly saw him. Mrs. Gass silently moved to prevent his further approach, putting her portly black silk skirts in his way. Her intentions were good.

“ Go back,” she whispered. “ Steal away before you are seen. Look at this unruly mob here. They might tear you to pieces, doctor, in the humour they are in.”

“ Let them—when I have stopped *that*,” he recklessly answered, pointing to what Thomas Hepburn was doing.

“ You are mad, doctor,” cried Mrs. Gass in excitement. “ Stop that! Why, look, sir, how impossible it would be, even with the best wish, to stop it now. A nail or two more knocked up, sir, and the lid’s off.”

It was as she said. Dr. Rane saw it. He took out his handkerchief, and passed it over his damp face.

“ Richard North gave me his word that he would stop it if it came to such a pass as this,” he murmured to himself more than to Mrs. Gass.

“ Richard North knows no more o’ this than it seems you knew of it,” she said. “ He is shut up in his room at the Hall, and hears nothing. Doctor, take advice

and get away," she imploringly whispered. "There's time yet."

"No," he doggedly said. "As it has gone so far, I'll stand my ground now."

Mrs. Gass groaned. The sound was lost in a rush—a fight—a hoarse roar—policemen contending against King Mob, King Mob against policemen. It turned even Mrs. Gass pale. Dr. Rane voluntarily arrested his advancing steps. Jelly lifted her face and peered out from the distant tree.

The lid had been lifted, and the open shell stood exposed. It was more than the excited numbers could witness, and be still. Inspector Jekyll and his fellows keep them back from looking into it? Never. A short, sharp struggle, and the police and their staves were nowhere. With a triumphant whoop the crowd flew forward.

But a strange hush, seemingly of consternation, had fallen on those who stood at the grave; a hush fell on these interlopers as they reached it. The coffin was empty.

Of all unexpected stoppages to proceedings, official or otherwise, a more complete one than this had never fallen. The old magistrate, the coroner—who had just come striding over the

ground, to see how things were going on—Thomas Hepburn, and others generally, stared at the empty coffin in profound perplexity.

And the draggle-tail mob, when it had taken its fill of staring also, elbowing each other in the process, and fighting ruefully for place and precedence, burst out into a roar. Not at all a complimentary one to Dr. Rane.

“ He have sold her for dissection, he have ! He never put her in at all, he didn’t ! He had a sham funeral ! ’Twarn’t enough to poison of her, but he must sell her a’ter it ! ”

To accuse a man of these heinous offences behind his back and beyond his hearing, is one thing, but it is not felt to be quite so convenient to do it in his presence. The sight of Dr. Rane walking calmly (not to say impudently) across the churchyard into their very midst, struck a kind of timidity on the spirits of the roarers. Silence supervened. They even parted to let him pass, backing on each other’s feet without mercy. Dr. Rane threw his glance on the empty coffin, and then on those who stood around it.

“ Well,” said he, “ why don’t you take me ? ”

And not a soul ventured to reply.

“ I have murdered my wife, have I ? If I have, why you know I deserve no quarter. Come, Mr. Coroner, why don’t you issue your edict to arrest me ? You have your officers handy.”

The exceeding independence with which this was spoken, the impudent freedom of Dr. Rane’s demeanour, the scornful mockery of his tone, could not be surpassed. He had the best of it now ; might say what he pleased, and laugh derisively at them at will : and they knew it. Even Dale, the coroner, felt small—which is saying a good deal of a lawyer.

Turning round, the doctor walked slowly back again, his umbrella swinging, his head aloft in the air. Mrs. Gass met him midway.

“ Tell me the truth for the love of goodness, doctor. I have never believed it of you. You did not help her to her death ?”

“ Help her to her death ?” he retorted. “ No : my wife was too dear to me for that. I’d have killed the whole world rather than her—if it must have come to killing at all.”

“ And I believe you, doctor,” was the hearty response. “ And I have told every-

body, from the first, that the charge was wicked and preposterous."

"Thank you, Mrs. Gass."

He broke from her, from any further questions she might have put, and stalked away towards Dallory, coolly saying that he had a patient to see.

As to the crowd, they really did not know what to make of this: it was a shameful cheat. The small throng of officials, including the police, seemed to know as little. To be enabled to take Oliver Rane into custody for the poisoning of his wife, they must first find the wife, and ascertain whether she had been poisoned. Lawyer Dale had never met with so bewildering a check in the long course of his practice; the red-faced Inspector stroked his chin, and the old magistrate clearly had not got his proper mind back yet.

By the appearance of the shell, it appeared pretty evident that the dead body had never been in it at all. What had he done with it?—where could he have hidden it? A thought crossed Mr. Jekyll, experienced in crime, that the doctor might have concealed it in his house—or buried it in his garden.

"How was it you did not feel the lightness

of the shell when you put it into the lead, you and your men?" asked the inspector, turning sharply to Thomas Hepburn.

"We did not do it," was the undertaker's answer. "Dr. Rane undertook that himself, on account of the danger of infection. We went and soldered the lead down, but it was all ready for us."

A clearer suspicion of guilt, than this fact conveyed, could not well be found: as they all murmured one to another. The old magistrate rubbed up his hair, as if by that means he could rub up his intellect.

"I don't understand," he said, still bewildered. "Why should he have kept her out of the coffin? If he—if he did what was wrong, surely to bury her out of sight would be the safest place to hide away his crime. What do you think about it, Jekyll?"

"Well, your worship, I can only think that—that he might have feared some such proceeding as this, and so secured himself against it," was the Inspector's answer. "I don't know, of course: it is only an idea."

"But *where* is the body, Jekyll?" persisted the magistrate. "What could he have done with it?"

“ It must be our business to find out, your worship.”

“ Did he cut her up ?” demanded the mob. For which interruption they were chased backwards by the army of discomfited policemen.

“ She may be about his premises still, your worship,” said the Inspector, hazarding the opinion. “ If so, I should say she is lying a few feet below the surface somewhere in the garden.”

“ Bless my heart, what a frightful thing !” cried his worship. “ And about this ? What is going to be done ?”

He pointed to the coffins and the open grave. Yes : what was to be done ? Lawyer Dale searched his legal memory and could not remember any similar precedent to guide him. A short counsel was held, the outsiders groaning and hissing an accompaniment to it.

“ When her bones is found, poor lady, they’ll want Chris’an bur’al : as good let the grave lie open,” interposed one of the grave-diggers respectfully—who no doubt wished to be spared the present labour of filling-in the earth. To which opinion the gentlemen, consulting there, condescended to listen.

And, finally, that course was decided upon : Thomas Hepburn being requested to have the coffins removed to his place, pending inquiry. And the gentlemen dispersed, and the mob after them.

A very dissatisfied mob, it was, shuffling and trampling out of the churchyard. They did not get much pleasure now, poor things, in their enforced idleness, their semi-starvation : and to be balked in this way was about as mortifying a termination as the day could have had. There was only one worse to be imagined—and that was a possibility not glanced at: that it should have been discovered poor Mrs. Rane died naturally.

The last person left in the churchyard—except a man or two who stayed to guard the coffins, while means were being brought to take them away—was Jelly. To have watched Jelly's countenance when the empty shell stood revealed, would have been as good as looking at a picture. The mouth opened, the jaw dropped, the eyes were strained. It was worse than even Jelly had supposed, and Dr. Rane was a greater villain. Not content with taking his wife's life, he had also taken her body. Whether he had disposed of it in the

manner affirmed by the mob, or in that suggested by the Inspector, or in any other way, the doctor must be one of the most hardened criminals breathing—his brazen demeanour just now in the graveyard would bear out *that*. And now the trouble was no nearer its clearance than before, and Jelly almost wished, as she had wished many a time lately, that she could die. Hiding herself from the spectators stood she, her brow pressed against the friendly tree's trunk, her heart faint within her. When the echoes of the trampling mob died away in the distance, Jelly lifted her head to depart also, drawing her black shawl around her with a shudder.

“*That's why she can't rest, poor lady ; she's not laid in consecrated ground. At the worst, I never suspected this.*”

CHAPTER XIII.

A NIGHT EXPEDITION.

SEVEN o'clock was striking out on a dark winter's night, as a hired carriage with a pair of post horses drew up near to the gates of Dallory Hall. Apparently the special hour had been agreed upon for a rendezvous ; for before the clock had well told its numbers, a small group of people might have been seen approaching the carriage from different ways.

There issued out from the Hall gates, Mr. North, leaning on the right arm of his son Richard. Richard had quitted his chamber to join in this expedition. His left arm was in a sling, and he looked pale : but he was fast advancing towards recovery ; and Mr. Seeley, consulted confidentially, had given him leave to go. Mrs. Gass came up from the direction of Dallory ; and Dr. Rane came striding from the Ham. A red-faced portly

gentleman in plain clothes, who was standing by the carriage, greeted them : without his official costume and in the dark night, few would have recognised him for Inspector Jekyll, who had been directing in the church-yard the day before. Mrs. Gass, Mr. North, and Richard, got into the carriage. The inspector was about to ascend to the box, the postilion being on the horses, but Dr. Rane said he would prefer to sit outside himself. So Mr. Jekyll got inside, and the doctor got up ; and the carriage drove away down Dallory Ham.

Peering out after it, in the dark night, behind the post of the gates, was Mrs. North. Someone by her side—it was only a servant-boy—ran off, at a signal from her, towards the stables with a message, as fast as his legs would carry him. There came back in answer Madam's carriage—which must have been waiting for the signal—with a pair of fresh fleet horses.

“ Catch it up, and keep it in sight at a distance,” were her orders to the coachman, as she stepped in. So the post carriage was being tracked and followed : a fact none of its inmates had the slightest notion of.

In her habit of peeping and prying, of listening at this door, of putting her ear to that, of glancing surreptitiously into other people's letters, and of ferreting generally, Madam had become aware during the last twenty-four hours, that some unusual stir was shaking the equanimity of Mr. North and Richard ; that some journey, to be taken in secret by Mr. North, and kept secret, was being determined on. Conscience—when it's not a good one—is apt to suggest all kinds of unpleasant things, and Madam's whispered to her that this hidden expedition had reference to herself ; and—perhaps—to a gentleman who had recently arrived in England, William Adair.

Madam's cheeks turned pale through powder and rouge, and she bit her lips and her nails in impotent rage. She could have found means, no doubt, to keep Mr. North in-doors, though she had broken his leg to do it ; she could have found means to keep Richard also, had she known he was to be of the party : but of what avail ? Never a cleverer woman lived, than Madam, and she had the sense to know that a meeting with Mr. Adair (and she believed the journey had reference to nothing

else) could not be prevented in this way : it must take place sooner or later.

A carriage was to be in waiting near the Hall gates after dark, at seven o'clock—Madam got hold of so much. Where was it going ? In which direction ? For what purpose ? At least Madam could ascertain that. She gave private orders of her own : and as night approached, retired to her room with a headache, forbidding Mr. North and the household to disturb her. Mr. North, as he eat his dinner in his parlour, thought how well things were turning out. He had been haunted with a fear of Madam's pouncing upon him, in the moment of departure, with a demand to know the why and the wherefore.

Madam, attired for a journey likewise, had escaped from the Hall long before seven, and taken up her place amidst the shrubs near the entrance gates, her position conveniently commanding both the way from the house and the road outside it. On the stroke of seven, steps were heard advancing ; and Madam strained her eyes.

Richard ! Richard ! Who had not yet been out of his sick room ! But for his voice, as he spoke to his father, and the black sling,

so clear as he passed her, Madam would have thought the night was playing tricks with her eyesight.

She could not see who else got into the carriage : but she did see Dr. Rane come striding by ; and she thought it was he upon the box when the carriage passed. Dr. Rane ? Madam, catching up her breath, wondered what private histories Mrs. Cumberland had confided to him, and how much of them he was now on his way to bear testimony to. Madam was altogether on the wrong scent—the result of her suggestive conscience.

In a twinkling almost, she was shut up in her own carriage, as described, her coachman alone outside it.

The man had no difficulty in obeying orders. The post-carriage was not as light as Madam's. Keeping at a safe distance, he followed in its wake, unsuspected. First of all, from the Ham down the back lane, and then through all kinds of unfrequented, cross-country by-ways. Altogether, as both drivers thought, fifteen or sixteen miles.

The post-carriage drew up at a solitary house, on the outskirts of a small hamlet. Madam's carriage halted too, further off. Getting out

of it, she told her coachman to wait ; and she stole cautiously along under cover of the hedge, to watch proceedings. It was then about nine o'clock.

They were all going into the house : a little crowd of them, as it seemed to Madam ; and the post-carriage went slowly away, perhaps to an inn. What had they gone to that house for ? Was Mr. Adair in it ? Madam was determined to see. She partly lost sight of prudence in her desperation, and was at the door just as it closed after them. Half a minute, and she knocked softly with her knuckles. It was opened by a young girl with a scarlet country face, and scarlet elbows.

“ Law !” said she, “ I thought they was all in. Do you belong to ‘em ?”

“ Yes,” said Mrs. North.

So she went in also, and crept up the dark staircase after them, directed by the girl. “ Fust door you comes to at the top.” Madam’s face was growing of a ghastly whiteness : she fully expected to see William Adair.

The voices would have guided her without anything else. Several were heard talking

together inside the room : her husband's she distinguished plainly : and, she thought, Madam certainly thought, he was sobbing. Madam went into a heat at that. What revelation had Mr. Adair been already making ? He had lost no time.

The door was not latched. Madam cautiously pushed it an inch or two open so as to enable her to see in. She looked very ugly just now, her lips drawn back from her teeth with emotion, something like a hyena's. Madam looked in : and saw, not Mr. Adair, but—Bessy Rane.

Bessy Rane. She was standing near the table, while Dr. Rane was talking. Standing quite still, with her placid face, her pretty curls falling, and a violet-coloured merino gown on, that Madam had seen her wear a dozen times. In short, it was just like Bessy Rane in life. On the table, by the side of the one candle, lay some white work, as if just put out of hand.

In all Madam's life she had perhaps never been so frightened as now—with present, sheer fright. The truth did not occur to her. She surely thought it was an apparition, as Jelly had before thought ; or that—or that—

Bessy had in some mysterious manner been conveyed hither from that empty grave. In these moments of confusion the mind is apt to run way with itself. Madam's was not strong enough to endure the shock, and be silent. With a piercing shriek, she turned to fly, and fell against a whitewashed chimney that the architect of the old-fashioned house had thought fit to carry upwards through the centre of it. The next moment she was in hysterics.

Bessy was the first to run to attend her. Bessy herself, you understand, not her ghost. In a corner of the capacious old room, built when ground was cheap, was Bessy's bed ; and on this they laid Mrs. North. Madam was not long in recovering her equanimity : but she continued where she was, making believe she was exhausted, and put a corner of her shawl over her face. For once in her life the face had some shame in it.

Yes : Bessy was not dead. Humanly speaking, there had never at all been any more probability of Bessy's demise than there was of Madam's at this moment. Dr. Rane is giving the explanation, and the others are standing to listen, except Mr. North, who has sat down

in an elbow chair of polished wood, while Richard leans the weight of his undamaged arm on its back. Mrs. Gass has pushed back her bonnet from her beaming face; the Inspector looks impassive as befits his calling, but on the whole pleased.

“I am not ashamed of what I have done,” said Dr. Rane, standing by Bessy’s side; “and I only regret it for the pain my wife’s supposed death caused her best friends, Mr. North and Richard. I would have given much to tell the truth to Mr. North, but I knew it would not be safe to entrust it to him, and so I wished to let it wait until we should have left the country. For all that has occurred you must blame the tontine. That is, blame the Ticknells, who obstinately, wrongly, cruelly kept the money from us. There were reasons—my non-success in my profession for one—why I wished to quit Dallory, and start afresh in another place: I and my wife talked of it until it grew, with me, into a disease; and I believe Bessy got to wish for it at last almost as I did.”

“Yes I did, Oliver,” she put in.

“Look at the circumstances,” resumed Dr. Rane, in his sternest tones, and not at all as

though he were on his defence. "There was the sum of money—two thousand pounds—belonging to me and my wife jointly, and they denied our touching it until one of us should be dead! It was monstrously unjust. I think you must acknowledge that much, Mr. Inspector."

"Well—it did seem hard," acknowledged that functionary.

"I know *I* thought it so," said Mrs. Gass.

"It was worse than hard," spoke the doctor passionately. "I used to say to my wife that if I could take it out of the old trustees' hands by force, or stratagem, I should think it no shame. Idle talk, it was; never meant to be anything else. But I'll get on. The fever broke out in Dallory, and Bessy was taken ill. She thought it was the fever, and so did I. I had fancied her a little afraid of it, and was in my heart secretly thankful to Mr. North for inviting her to the Hall. But for her putting off the going to it for a day—which she did herself through the absence of Molly Green—what happened later could never have taken place."

Dr. Rane paused, as if considering how he should go on with his story. After a moment

he resumed it, looking straight at them, as he had been looking all along.

“ I wish you to understand that every word I am telling you—and shall tell you—is the strict truth. The truth, upon my honour, and before Heaven. And yet, perhaps, even after this, you will scarcely give me credit when I say—that I did believe my wife’s illness was the fever. All that first day (she had been taken ill during the night with sickness and shivering) I thought it was the fever. Seeley thought it. She was in a very high state of feverishness, and no doubt the fear of the fever for her served somewhat to bias our judgment. Bessy herself said it was the fever, and would not hear a word of hope to the contrary. But at night—the night of the first day, remember—she had nearly an hour of sickness; and was so relieved by it, and grew so cool and collected, that I detected the nature of the case. It was nothing but a bad bilious attack, accompanied by a very unusual degree of fever; but not *the* fever. ‘ You have cheated me, my darling,’ I said in a jesting way as I kissed her, ‘ I shall not get the tontine.’—Here she stands by my side to confirm or refute it,” broke off Dr.

Rane, but indeed they could all see he was relating the simple truth. “ ‘Can you not pretend that I am dead, Oliver?’ she answered faintly, for she was still exceedingly ill; ‘I’ll go away, and you can say I died.’ Now of course Bessy spoke this jestingly, as I had done: but nevertheless the words did lead to what afterwards took place. *I* proposed it—do not lay the blame on Bessy—that she really should go away, and I should give out that she was dead.”

A slight groan from the region of the bed, smothered at once by a pretended snore. Dr. Rane continued.

“ In prospective it seemed very easy of accomplishment—very. But had I foreseen all the disagreeable proceedings, the artifice, the trouble, that must inevitably attend such an attempted deceit, I should never have entered upon it. Had I properly reflected, I of course might have foreseen it: but I did not reflect. Like a great many schemes that we enter upon in life, the mind skips the working, and is content to skip it, and looks only to the end accomplished. Nearly all that night Bessy and I conversed together: chiefly planning how she should get away and where she

should stay. By morning, what with the fatigue induced by this prolonged vigil, and the exhaustion left from her illness, she was thoroughly worn out. It had been agreed between us that she should simulate weariness and a desire to sleep, the better to evade a discovery of her, so far, restoration ; but there was no need to simulate ; she was both sleepy and exhausted."

"I never was so sleepy before in all my life," interrupted Bessy.

"The day went on. At ten o'clock, when Phyllis left, I went up to my wife's room, and told her the time for acting had come," pursued Dr. Rane. "Next I crossed over to Seeley's with the news that my wife was gone : and I strove to show the grief I should have felt had it been true. Crossing back to my home again, I saw Frank Dallory, and told him. 'The play is inaugurated,' I said to Bessy when I went in—and then I betook myself to Mr. North ; and then on to Hepburn's. Do you remember, sir, how I tried to soothe your grief ?—speaking persistently of hope—though of course you could not see that any hope remained," asked Dr. Rane, turning to Mr. North. "I dared not speak more plainly, though I longed to do it."

“ Ay, I do remember,” answered Mr. North. “ The worst part of all the business was the next ; the bringing in of the shell,” continued the doctor. “ Worse, because I had a horror of my wife seeing it. I contrived that she did not. Hepburn’s men brought it up to the ante-room. Bessy was in bed still in the front room, and she heard them : I could not help that. When they left, I put it down by the side of the wall with the trestles, threw some of my coats carelessly upon it, and so hid it. It was time then for Bessy to get up. While she was dressing, I went round to the stables, where the gig and horse I used are kept, to make sure that the ostler had gone to bed—for he had a habit sometimes of sitting up late. It was during this absence of mine that Bessy, dressed all but her gown, went to the landing to listen whether, or not, I had come in. The chamber door was open, so that the light shone on the landing ; it happened to be at that moment that Jelly was at the opposite window, and she—later—took it to be Mrs. Rane’s ghost that she saw.”

The sight of Mrs. Gass’s amused face was something good. She nodded in triumph.

"I thought it might be beer," said she. "I told Jelly what an uncommon idiot she was. Ghost, indeed!"

"Bessy made herself ready, took some refreshment, and I brought the gig to the back door in the garden, and drove my wife away. The only place open at that time of night—or rather morning—would be some insignificant open railway station. We fixed on Hewley. I drove her there; and left her sitting under cover in solitary state—for I had to get back with the horse and gig before people were astir. As soon as the morning was pretty well on, so as not to be remarked by strangers, Bessy walked to Churchend, about five miles' distance, and took a lodging in this house—this same room. Where she has been ever since—and it is a vast deal longer time than we calculated on. Poison my wife!" added Dr. Rane, with some emotion, as he drew her to him involuntarily, with a gesture of genuine love. "She is rather too precious to me for that. *You* know; don't you, my darling."

The happy tears stood in her eyes as she met his. He stooped and kissed her, very fondly.

“ If my wife were taken from me, the Ticknells might keep the tontine money, and welcome ; I should not care for it without Bessy. It was chiefly for her sake that my great desire to possess it arose,” he added, emphatically. “ I could not bear that she should be reduced to so poor a home after Dallory Hall. Bessy constantly said that she did not mind it, but *I* did ; minded it for her.”

“ Couldn’t you have managed all this without the funeral ?” asked Richard North, speaking for the first time.

“ *How* could I ?” returned Dr. Rane. “ There were no means of avoiding it. When my wife was given out as dead, she had to be buried, or Mr. Inspector Jekyll, there, might have been coming in to ask the reason why. Had I properly thought of all that must be done, I should, as I say, never have attempted it. It was hateful to me ; and I declare that I don’t know how I could, or did, carry it through. Once or twice I thought I must stick fast, and confess, to my shame, that Bessy was alive—but I felt that might be worse, of the two, than going on with it to the end. I hope the Ticknells will suffer for what they have cost me.”

“Jelly says she saw the ghost twice,” observed Mrs. Gass, her eyes twinkling still.

“Ah! that was Bessy’s fault,” said Dr. Rane, shaking his head at his wife, in mock reproof, as we do at a beloved child when it is naughty. “She was so imprudent as to come home for a few hours—walking across country by easy stages and getting in after nightfall. It was about her clothes. I have been over here twice at night—or three times, is it not, Bessy?—and brought her things each time. But I brought the most valuable of them: Bessy said she must have the others; and at last, as I tell you, she came herself, to look after them. I think the clothes were only an excuse—eh, Bessy?”

“Partly,” acknowledged Bessy. “For, oh! I longed for a sight of home. Just one more sight as a farewell. I had quitted it in so bewildered a hurry. It again led to Jelly’s seeing me. I was at my large chest-of-drawers, papa,” she continued, as if speaking for Mr. North alone. “Oliver had gone round to get the gig to bring me back; I thought I heard him come in again, and went to the landing to listen. It was not he, but Jelly: and we met face to face. I assure you she

frightened *me*—for consequences—quite as much as I did her."

"And, Bessy, my dear, what have the people here thought about it all the time?" inquired Mr. North. "Do they know who you are?"

"Why of course not, papa. They think I am a lady in poor health, staying here for the sake of country air—and I did feel and look very ill when I came. It is an old widow lady who has the house, and the girl you saw is her servant. They are not curious. They know us only as Mr. and Mrs. Oliver, and think we live at Bletchley. I want to know who it was that pushed matters to extremity in regard to these proceedings against my husband," added Mrs. Rane, after a pause. "It was not you, papa: and Richard was doing his best to hush it all up. Richard had known the truth since an interview he held with Oliver. Who was it, papa?"

Madam tumbled off the bed, moaning a little, as if she were very weak. Bessy had not the slightest idea that Madam had been the culprit.

"Who was it, Mr. Jekyll?" continued Bessy.

The Inspector looked up to the ceiling and down to the floor ; and then thought the candle wanted snuffing. Which it certainly did. Madam said in a shrieking voice as he was putting down the snuffers, that she should depart. If the others chose to stay and countenance all this unparalleled iniquity, *she* could not.

She stood, upright as ever, tossing back her head, all her native impudence returning to her. Dr. Rane quietly put himself in her path as she was gaining the door.

“Mrs. North, pardon me if I request you to give me a little information ere you depart, as it is probably the last time we shall meet. What has been the cause of the long-continued and persistent animosity you have borne towards me ?”

“*Animosity to you !*” returned Madam, flippantly. “I have borne none.”

The exceeding coolness of the avowal, in the teeth of facts, struck them as almost ludicrous. Mr. North raised his head and gazed at her in surprise.

“You have pursued me with the most bitter animosity since the first moment that I came to Dallory, Madam,” said Dr. Rane,

quietly and steadily. "You have kept practice from me ; you have done what you can to crush me. It is you who urged-on this recent charge against me—a very present proof of what I assert. But for you it might never have been made."

Madam was slightly at bay : she seemed just a little flurried. Rallying her powers, she confronted Dr. Rane and told him that she did not think him skilful and did not personally like him : if she had been biassed against him, the feeling must have taken its rise in that—there was nothing else.

Another of her shuffling untruths—and they all knew it for one. But they would get nothing better from her.

The fact was this. Madam had feared that Mrs. Cumberland could, and perhaps would, throw some light on a certain episode of the past years ; which contingency Madam had dreaded above any earthly thing : for this she had wished and hoped to drive Mrs. Cumberland from the place, and had deemed that if she could drive away Oliver Rane, his mother might follow. That was the real truth : but no living person, save Madam, suspected it.

She quitted the room with the last denial,

conscious that she did not just now appear to advantage—the sneaking act of tracking them this night, Madam, with all her sophistry, could not plead an excuse for. They let her go. Even the Inspector did not pay her the courtesy of opening the door for her exit, or of lighting her down the crooked old wooden stairs. It was Bessy who ran to do it.

“When you found things were going to be pushed against you, sir, why did you not declare the truth?” asked the Inspector of Dr. Rane.

“I knew that the moment I declared the truth, all hope of the tontine money would be at an end ; that I should have done what I had done for nothing,” answered Dr. Rane. “Richard North undertook to give me notice in time if things should be pushed to an extremity ; but he got disabled, you know, and could not. Until they were in the act of disturbing the grave, I had no warning of it.”

A pause of silence followed the answer. Dr. Rane resumed.

“Ill-luck seems to have attended it from the first. Perhaps nothing better was to be expected. Jelly’s having seen my wife was a

great misfortune. And then look at the delay as to the tontine money! Had the trustees paid it at once, Bessy and I should have been safe away long ago."

"Where to?" asked Mrs. Gass.

"America. It is where we shall now go, in any case. As I have not the money to join Dr. Jones as partner, I daresay he'll be glad of me as an assistant."

"Look here," said Mrs. Gass. "I don't say that what you've done is anything but a very wrong thing, doctor; but it might have been worse: and, compared to what a lot o' fools were saying, it seems but a trifle. I was once about to make you an offer of some money. Finding you couldn't get the tontine paid to you and your wife; which, as I've told you, I thought was a shame, all circumstances considered; I resolved to advance it to you myself. Mrs. Rane's death stopped me: leastways, her reported death. You won't get it now, doctor, for certain, from the Ticknells—for I suppose they'll have to be told the truth: and so you shall have it from me. Two thousand pounds is ready for you, at your command."

A red spot of emotion flushed Dr. Rane's

pale face. He gazed at Mrs. Gass eagerly, as if asking whether it could be true.

“It’s all right, doctor. You are my late husband’s nephew, you know, and all the money was his. You’ll find yourself and your wife substantially remembered in my will; and as two thousand pounds of it may do you good now, it shall be advanced to you.”

Bessy stole round to Mrs. Gass, and burst into tears on her bosom. Happy, grateful tears. The doctor, the scarlet flush deepening on his face, took Mrs. Gass’s hand and clasped it.

“And I wish to my very heart I had made no delay in the offer at first,” cried Mrs. Gass. “It’ll always be a warning to me not to put off till to-morrow what should be done to-day. And so, doctor, there’s the money ready; and Bessy, my dear, I don’t see why you and he need banish of yourselves to America. You might get a good practice, doctor, and not go further nor London.”

“I must go to America; I must go,” said the doctor, hastily. “Neither I nor Bessy would like now to stay in England.”

“Well, perhaps you may be right,” acquiesced Mrs. Gass.

“ But it’s a long way,” said Mr. North.

“ It may not be for ever, sir,” observed Dr. Rane, cheerfully. “ I know I shall do well there; and when I have made a fortune perhaps we may come back and live in London. Never again in Dallory. Or, if not to live, to visit. The old and the new world are brought very near each other now, sir.”

Is it of any use pursuing the interview to its close? When they went out again, after it was over, Madam’s carriage was only then driving off. Madam’s coachman had put up his horses somewhere; and neither he nor they could be readily found. There was apparently no house open in the primitive village, and Madam had the pleasure of undergoing an hour or two’s soaking in a good, sound, down-pouring of rain.

“ I shall have to make things right with the authorities; and I suppose Hepburn may keep the coffins for his pains,” quaintly remarked Mr. Inspector Jekyll.

But the carriage took back one less than it had brought. For Dr. Rane did not return again to Dallory.

PART THE THIRD.

CHAPTER XV.

ARTHUR BOHUN'S SHAME.

A WELL-SPREAD dessert table of glass and china and plate, glittering under the rays of the handsome chandelier in the dining-room of Sir Nash Bohun's town house. Sir Nash and his nephew Arthur are seated at it, one guest between them. It is General Strachan ; an old officer, Scotch by birth, who has just come home after passing the best part of his life in India.

The winter was departing. Arthur Bohun looked better, Sir Nash pretty well. In a month or two both intended to depart for the German springs, that were to renovate Sir Nash's life.

General Strachan had been very intimate

with Sir Nash Bohun in early life, before he went out at all to India. After he went out he had been equally intimate with Major Bohun: but he was only Captain Strachan then.

"And so you think Arthur like his father," observed Sir Nash, as he passed the claret.

"The very image of him," replied the general. "I'm sure I should have known him for Tom Bohun's son had I met him accidentally in the street. Adair saw the likeness, too."

"What Adair's that?" carelessly asked Sir Nash.

"William Adair. You saw me with him at the club door this morning. We were going in at the moment when you came up."

Perhaps Sir Nash was a little struck with the name. He called to mind a good-looking, slender, gentlemanly man, who had been arm-in-arm with the general at the time mentioned.

"But what Adair is it, Strachan?"

"What Adair? Why, the one who was in India when—when poor Tom died. He was Tom's greatest friend. Perhaps you have never heard of him?"

"Yes I have, to my sorrow," said Sir Nash. "It was he who caused poor Tom's death."

General Strachan apparently did not understand. "Who caused poor Tom's death?"

"Adair."

"Why bless me, where could you have picked up that?" cried the general in surprise. "If Adair could have saved Tom's life at any sacrifice to himself he'd have done it. They were close, firm friends to the last."

Sir Nash seemed to be listening as though he heard not. "Of course we did not get at the particulars of my brother's death, over here, as we should have got at them had we been on the spot," he remarked. "We were glad, rather, to hush it up for the sake of Arthur. Poor Tom got into some trouble, some disgrace, and Adair led him into it. That's what we have always heard."

"Then you heard wrong, Bohun," said the general somewhat bluntly. "Tom got into debt, and I don't know what all, but it was not Adair that led him into it. Who could have told you it was?"

"Mrs. Bohun, Tom's widow."

"Oh, she," returned the general, in an accent of contempt that spoke volumes. "Why she—but never mind now," he broke off, suddenly glancing at Arthur as he remembered that she was his mother. "Let by-gones be bygones, Bohun," he added, sipping his claret; "no good to recal them. Only don't continue to believe aught against William Adair. He is one of the best men living, and always has been."

Arthur Bohun, who had sat still as a stone, leaned his pale face a little towards the general, and spoke.

"Did not this Mr. Adair, after my father's death, get into disgrace, and—and undergo its punishment?"

"Never. Adair got into no disgrace."

"Has he been a convict?" continued Arthur in a low, clear tone.

"A WHAT?" cried the general, putting down his glass and staring at Arthur in amazement. "My good young fellow, you cannot know of whom you are speaking. William Adair has been a respected man all his life: he is just as honourable as your father was—and the world knew pretty well what poor Tom's fastidious notions on the

point of honour were. Adair is a gentleman amidst gentlemen ; I can't say better of him than that, though I talked for an hour. He is come into all the family honours and fortune ; which he never expected to do. A good old Scotch family it is, too ; better than mine. There, we'll drop the subject now : no good to reap up things that are past and done with."

Sir Nash asked no more : neither did Arthur. Some instinct lay within both of them that, for their own sakes, it might be better not.

But when the general left—which he did very soon, having an evening engagement—Arthur went out with him. Arthur Bohun knew, as well as though he had been told, that his wicked mother—he could but think of her so in that moment—had dealt treacherously with him ; to answer some end of her own, she had calumniated Mr. Adair. Cost him what pain and shame it might, he would clear it up now.

"Will you give me the particulars—that which you would not give my uncle," began Arthur in agitation, the moment they were out of the house, as he placed his hand on

the general's arm. "No matter what they are, I must know them."

"I'd give them to your uncle, and welcome," said the plain old soldier. "It was to you I would not give them."

"But I must learn them."

"Not from me."

"If you will not tell them, I shall apply to William Adair."

"William Adair can give them you if he pleases. I shall not. Take advice, my dear young friend, and don't enquire."

"I will tell you what I suspect—that if any one had a hand in driving my father to—to do what he did do, it was his wife; my mother. You may tell me now."

"No. Because she is your mother."

"But I have the most urgent reason for wishing to know the particulars."

"Well, Arthur Bohun, I'd rather not tell you, and that's the truth. If poor Tom could hear me in his grave, I don't think he'd like it, you see. No, I can't. Ask Adair, first of all, whether he'd advise it, or not."

"Where is he staying?"

"Grosvenor Place. He and his daughter are in a furnished house there. She is very delicate."

“And—you say—I beg your pardon, General,” added Arthur in agitation, detaining him as he was going away—“you say that he is an untainted gentleman.”

“Who? Adair? As untainted as you or I, my young friend. Good night.”

In his mind’s miserable tumult, any delay seemed dreadful, and Arthur Bohun turned at once to the house in Grosvenor Place. He asked if he could see Mr. Adair.

The servant hesitated. “There is no Mr. Adair here, sir,” he said.

Arthur looked up at the number. “Are you sure?” he asked of the man. “I was informed by General Strachan that Mr. Adair had taken this house, and was living here.”

“The General must have said Sir William, sir. Sir William Adair lives here.”

“Oh—Sir William,” spoke Arthur, “I—I was not aware Mr. Adair had been knighted.”

“Knighted, sir! My master has not been knighted, sir,” cried the man, as if he were indignant at the charge. “Sir William has succeeded to the baronetcy through the death of his uncle, Sir Archibald.”

What with one thing and another, Arthur’s

head seemed to be in a whirl. Sir Archibald Adair had been well known to him by reputation: a proud old Scotch baronet, of a proud old lineage. And so this was Ellen's family! And he had been deeming her not fit to mate with him, a Bohun!

"Can I see Sir William? Is he at home?"

"He is at home, sir. I think you can see him."

In the dining-room of the house sat Sir William Adair when Arthur was shown in—his after-dinner coffee on a stand by his side, a newspaper in his hand. He was a slight man of rather more than middle height, with an attractive countenance. The features were good, their expression was noble and pleasing. It was impossible to associate such a face and bearing with anything like dishonour.

"I believe my name is not altogether strange to you, sir," said Arthur as the servant closed the door. "I hope you will pardon my intrusion—and especially that it should be at this late hour."

Sir William had risen to receive him. He could but mark the agitation with which the words were spoken. A moment's vacillation,

and then he took Arthur's hand and clasped it within his own.

"If I wished to be cold to you I could not," he said warmly. "For, to me, you seem to be your father come to life again. He and I were friends."

"And did you wish to be cold to me?" asked Arthur.

"I have felt cold to you this many a year. Worse than that."

"But why, Sir William?"

"Ah—why. I cannot tell you. For one thing, I have pictured you as resembling another, more than him."

"You mean my mother."

Sir William looked at Captain Bohun before he replied. "Yes, I do. Will you take a seat: and some coffee?"

Arthur sat down, but it may be questioned whether he as much as heard that coffee was mentioned. Sir William rang the bell and ordered a cup of it to be brought in. Arthur leaned forward to speak; his blue eyes solemnly earnest, his hand a little outstretched. Sir William almost started.

"How strangely like him you are!" he exclaimed. "The look, the gesture, the voice,

all are your father's over again. I could fancy that you were Thomas Bohun—as I *last* saw him in life."

"You knew him well,—and my mother? You knew all about them?"

"Quite well. I knew you too when you were a little child."

"Tell me one thing then," said Arthur, his emotion increasing. "Was she my mother?"

The question surprised Sir William Adair. "She was certainly your mother, and your father's wife. Why do you ask it?"

"Because—she has so acted—that I—that I—have many a time wished she was not. I have almost hoped it. I wish I could hope it now."

"Ah," said Sir William. It was all he said.

"Did you care much for my father, Sir William?"

"More than I ever cared for any other man. I have never cared for one since as I cared for him. We were young fellows then, he and I; not much older than you are now; but ours was a true friendship."

"Then I conjure you, by that friendship,

to disclose to me the whole history of the past: the circumstances attending my father's shocking death, and its cause. Speak of things as though my mother were no blood relative of mine. I wish to heaven she never had been!"

"I think you must know somewhat of the circumstances," spoke Sir William. "Else why should you say this?"

"It is because I know part that I must know the whole. My mother has—has—*lied* to me," he concluded, bringing out the word with a painful effort. "She has fostered a false story upon me, and—I cannot rest."

"Arthur Bohun, although you conjure me by your late father, and for his sake I would do a great deal, I fear that I ought not to do this."

"General Strachan bade me come to you. I begged of him to tell me, but he said no. Does he know all?" broke off Arthur.

"Every tittle. I think he and I and your mother are nearly the only three left who do know it. There were but some half-dozen of us altogether."

"And do you not think that I, Major Bohun's only son, should at least be made ac-

quainted with as much as others know ? Tell it me, Sir William : for my lost father's sake."

"The only difficulty is—that you must hear ill of your mother."

"I cannot hear worse of her than I know," impetuously returned Arthur. "Perhaps it was not as bad as I am imagining that it may have been."

But Sir William held back. The coffee came in and Arthur drank it at a gulp, scalding hot, and sent the cup away again. He seemed on the brink of a fever in his impatience. And, whether it was that, or to clear the memory of Major Bohun, or that he deemed it a righteous thing to satisfy Major Bohun's son, or that he yielded to over-persuasion, Sir William Adair spoke.

They sat nearly together, the small coffee table between them. Whether the room was light or whether the room was dark, neither remembered. It was a miserable tale they were absorbed in ; one that need not be very much elaborated here.

William Adair, when a young man, quarrelled with his family, or they with him, and an utter estrangement took place. His father

and mother were dead, but his uncle, Sir Archibald, and other relatives, were left. He, the young man, went to the Madras Presidency, appointed to some post there in the civil service. His family made a boast of discarding him ; he, in return, was so bitterly incensed and resentful against them, that had it been well practicable, he would have abandoned the very name—Adair. Never a word did he breathe to anyone of who or what his family was ; his Scotch accent betrayed his country, but people knew no more. That he was a gentleman, and in a gentleman's position, was apparent, and that was all-sufficient.

“A strong friendship ensued between him and Major Bohun. During one hot season it happened that they both went up in search of health to the Blue Mountains, as Indians call the beautiful region of the Neilgherry Hills. Mrs. Bohun accompanied her husband ; Mr. Adair was not married. There they made the acquaintance of the Reverend George Cumberland, who was stationed at Ootacamund with his wife. Ootacamund was at that time filled, and a great deal of gaiety (a great deal considering what the place was) was going on ; Mrs. Bohun was noted for it. There was

some gambling nightly: and no votary joined in it more persistently than she. Major Bohun removed with her to a little place at a short distance, and a few others went also; the chaplain, George Cumberland, was one.

There came a frightful day for Major Bohun. Certain claims suddenly swooped down upon him; debts; promissory notes, bearing his signature in conjunction with William Adair's. Neither understood what it could mean, for they had given nothing of the kind. A momentary thought arose to Major Bohun—that his wife was implicated; but only so far as that she might have joined in this high play; nothing worse. He had become aware that she had a passion for gambling, and the discovery had frightened him: in fact it was to wean her from undesirable associates and pursuits that he had come away on this holiday; the ostensible plea, health, was not the true one. But this was not known even to his best friend, William Adair. "Let me investigate this, let me deal with it," said the major to Mr. Adair. But Mr. Adair, not choosing to let a man forge his name with impunity—and he had no suspicion it was a woman—did not heed the injunction, but addressed himself to

the investigation. And a nice nest of iniquity he found. He traced the affair home to one Rabbetson—but that was in all probability an assumed name—a man bad in every way ; who was no better than a blackleg ; who had wormed himself into society to prey upon it, and upon men and women's failings. This man Mr. Adair confronted with Major Bohun ; and then—and then—the fellow, brought to bay, braved it out by disclosing who his helpmate was—Mrs. Bohun.

It was even so. Mr. Adair sat aghast at the revelation. Had he suspected this, he would have kept it to himself. How far she had connected herself with this man, it was best not to enquire : and they never did enquire, and never knew. One thing was certain—the man could afford to take a high ground. He went out from the interview bidding them do their worst—which with him would not be much, he affirmed ; for it was not he who had issued the false bills, but the major's wife. And they saw he spoke the truth.

Arthur Bohun listened to this now, sitting still as a statue.

“I never saw any man so overcome as

Bohun," continued Sir William Adair. "He took it to heart; to heart. 'And she is the mother of my child!' he said to me; and then he gave way, and held my hands in his, and sobbed upon my shoulder. 'We will hush it up; we will take up the bills and the other obligations,' I said to him: though in truth I did not see how I should do my part in it, for I was a poor man: he was poor also; his expenses and his wife kept him so. 'It cannot be hushed up, Adair,' he answered; 'it has gone too far.' Those were the last words he ever said to me; it was the last time I saw him alive."

"Go on," said Arthur, without lifting his head.

"Mrs. Bohun came into the room, and I quitted it. I saw by her face that she knew what had happened; it was full of evil as she turned it on me. Rabbetson had met her when he was going out, and whispered some words in her ear. What passed between her and Major Bohun I never knew. Before I had been five minutes in my rooms she stood before me; she had followed me down. Of all the vituperation that a woman's tongue can utter, hers lavished about the worst on

me. It was I who had brought on the crisis, she said ; it was I who had taken Rabbetson to her husband. I quietly told her that when I took Rabbetson to Major Bohun, I had not the remotest idea that she was mixed up with the affair in any way ; and that if I had known it, known what Rabbetson could say, I never should have taken him, but have striven to deal with it myself, and keep it dark for my friend Bohun's sake. She would hear nothing ; she was like a mad woman : she cursed me ; she swore that not a word of it was true ; that Rabbetson did not say it, could not have said it, but that I and Major Bohun had concocted the tale between us. In short, I think she was, for the time being, mad."

"Stay a moment, Sir William," interrupted Arthur. "Who was she ? I have never known. I don't think my father's family ever did know."

"Neither did I ever know—to a certainty. A cousin, or sister, or some relative of hers, had married a doctor in practice at Madras, and she was out there on a visit to them. Captain Bohun—as he was then—caught by her face and figure, both fine in those days,

fell in love with her and married her. He found afterwards that her father kept an hotel somewhere in England."

So! This was the high-born lady who had set up for being above all Dallory. But for the utmost self-control Arthur Bohun would have groaned outright.

"Go on, please," was all he said. "Get it finished."

"There is not much more," returned Sir William. "I went looking about for Bohun everywhere that afternoon; and could not find him. Just before sun-down he was found—found as—as I daresay you have heard. The spot was retired and shady, and his pistol lay beside him. He had not suffered: death must have been instantaneous."

"The report here was that he died of sun-stroke," said Arthur, breaking a long pause.

"No doubt. Mrs. Bohun caused it to be so reported. The real facts transpired but to few: Cumberland, Captain Strachan, myself, and two or three others."

"Did Mrs. Cumberland know of them?" suddenly asked Arthur, a thought striking him.

“I daresay not. I don’t suppose her husband would disclose to her the shameful tale. She was not on the spot at the time ; had gone to nurse some friend who was sick. I respected both the Cumberlands highly. We made a kind of compact among ourselves, we men, not to speak of this story ever, unless it should be to defend Bohun, or for some other good purpose. We wished to give Mrs. Bohun a chance to redeem her acts and doings in her own land, for which she at once sailed. Arthur, if I have had to say this to *you*, it is to vindicate your dead father. I believe that your mother has dreaded me ever since.”

Dreaded him ! Ay ! and foully aspersed him in her insane dread. Arthur thought of the wicked invention she had raised, and passed his hands upon his face as if he could shut out the remembrance.

“What became of Rabbetson ?” he asked, in a low tone.

“He disappeared. I think, else, I should surely have shot him in his turn, or kicked him to death. I saw him afterwards in Australia dying in the most abject misery.”

“And the claims ?—the bills ?”

"I took them upon myself ; and contrived to pay—with time."

"You left India for Australia ?" continued Arthur, after a pause.

"My health failed, and I petitioned our government to remove me to a different climate. They complied, and sent me to Australia. I stayed there, trying to accumulate a competency that should enable me to live at home with Ellen as befitted my family: little supposing that I was destined to become its head. My two cousins, Sir Archibald's sons, have died one after the other!"

Arthur Bohun had heard all he wished, perhaps all there was to tell. If—if he could make his peace with Ellen, the old relations between them might yet be renewed. But while his heart bounded with the hope, the red shame crimsoned his brow as he thought of the past. Glancing at the time-piece on the mantle-shelf, he saw it was only half-past nine; not too late.

"May I see your daughter, sir ?" he asked in a low tone. "We used to be good friends."

"So I suppose," replied Sir William. "You made love to her, Mr. Arthur Bohun. You

would have married her, I believe, but that I stopped it."

" You—stopped it!" exclaimed Arthur, quite at sea: for he had not known of the letter received by Ellén.

" I wrote to Ellen, telling her I must forbid her to marry you. I feared at the time of writing that the interdict might not arrive in time. But it seems it did."

" Yes," abstractedly returned Arthur, letting pass what he did not understand.

" You see, I had been thinking of you always as belonging to her—your mother—more than to him. That mistake is over. I shall value you now as *his* son; more I dare-say than I shall ever value any other young man in this world."

Arthur's breath came fast and thick. " Then—you—you will give her to me, sir!"

Sir William shook his head in sadness. Arthur misunderstood the meaning.

" The probability is, sir, that I shall be Sir Arthur Bohun; that I shall succeed my uncle in the baronetcy. Would it not satisfy you?"

" You can see her if you will," was Sir

William's answer, but there was the same sad kind of denial in his manner. "I would not say No now for your father's sake. She is in the drawing-room. Upstairs, front room. I will join you as soon as I have written a note."

Arthur found his way to it by instinct. Ellen was lying back in an easy chair; the brilliant light of the chandelier shining on her face. Opening the door softly, it—that face—was the first object that struck his sight. And he started back from it in a kind of amazed terror.

Was it *death* that he saw written there? All too surely the conviction came home to him.

Oh! but it was a more momentous interview than the one just over. Explaining he knew not how, explaining he knew not what, save that his love had never left her, Arthur Bohun knelt at her feet, and they mingled their sobs together. For some minutes neither could understand the other: but elucidation came at last. Arthur told her that the wicked tale, the frightful treachery which had parted them was but a concocted

fable on his mother's part, and then he found that Ellen had never known anything about the tale.

"What then did you think was the matter with me?" he asked.

And she told him. She told him without reserve, now that she found how untrue it was: she thought he had given her up for another. Madam had informed her he was about to marry Miss Dallory.

He took in the full sense of what the words implied: of the very abject light in which his conduct must have appeared to her. Going to marry Mary Dallory! A groan burst from him: he covered his face to hide its shame and trouble.

"Ellen! Ellen! You *could* not have thought it of me."

"It was what I did think. How was I to think anything else? Your mother said it."

"Lord forgive her her sins!" he wailed, in his despair. Ellen hid her face.

"It was enough to kill you, Ellen. No wonder you look like this."

She was panting a little. Her breath seemed very short.

"Pray Heaven I may be enabled to make

it up to you when you are my wife. I will try hard, my darling."

"I shall not live for it, Arthur."

A spasm took his heart. The words struck him as being so very real.

"Arthur, I have known it for some time now. You must not grieve for me. I think even that death is rather near."

"What has killed you? I?"

A flush passed over her wan face. Yes, he had killed her. That is, his conduct had : the sensitive crimson betrayed it.

"I suppose the fact is, I should not in any case have lived long," she said, aloud. "I believe they feared something of the kind for me years ago. Arthur, don't! Don't weep; I cannot bear it."

Sir William Adair had just told him how his father had wept in *his* misery. And before Arthur could well collect himself, Sir William entered.

"You see," he whispered aside to Arthur, "why it may not be. There will be no marriage for her in this life. I am not surprised. I seem to have expected it always: my wife, her mother, died of decline."

Arthur Bohun quitted the house, over-

whelmed with shame and sorrow. What regret is there like unto that for past mistaken conduct which can never be repaired, never remedied in this world ?

CHAPTER XVI.

NO HOPE.

ONCE more, and for good, does the scene change to Dallory.

Seated on the lawn-bench at Dallory Hall in the sweet spring sunshine—for the time has again gone on—was Ellen Adair. Sir William Adair and Arthur Bohun were pacing amidst the flower-beds that used to be Mr. North's. Arthur stooped and plucked a magnificent pink hyacinth.

“It is not treason, sir, is it?” he asked, smiling.

“What is not treason?” returned the elder man.

“To pick this.”

“Pick as many as you like,” said Sir William.

“Mr. North never liked us to pluck his flowers. Now and then Madam would make

a ruthless swoop upon them for her entertainments. It grieved his heart bitterly: and I think that was whence we got an idea that he did not like us to pluck them."

"No wonder," said Sir William.

The restoration to the old happiness, the clearing-up of the dreadful cloud that had so fatally told upon her, seemed to infuse new vigour into Ellen's shortening span of life. With the exception of her father, everybody thought she was recovering: the doctors admitted, rather dubiously, that it "might be." She got wonderfully well through the winter, went out and about almost as of old; and when more genial weather set in, it was suggested by friends that she should be taken to a warmer climate. Ellen opposed it; it would be of no avail she knew, perhaps only hasten on the end; and after a private interview Sir William had with the doctors, *he* did not second it. Her great wish was to go to Dallory: and arrangements for their removal thither were made.

Dallory Hall was empty, and Sir William found that he could occupy it for the present if he pleased. Mr. North had removed to the house that had been Mrs. Cumberland's, leav-

ing his own furniture (in point of fact it was Richard's) at the Hall, hoping the next tenant, whoever that might prove to be, would take to it. Miss Dallory seemed quite undecided what to do with the Hall, whether to let it for a term again, or not. But she was quite willing that Sir William Adair should have it for a month or two.

And so he came down with Ellen, bringing his servants. This was only the third day after their arrival, and Mr. Arthur Bohun had arrived. Sir William had told him he might come when he would.

The change seemed to have done Ellen good, and she had had her visitors. Mrs. Gass had been there ; Mr. North had come ; and Richard ran in for a few minutes daily. Sir William welcomed them all heartily ; Mrs. Gass warmly ; for she was the sister-in-law of Mrs. Cumberland, and Ellen had told him of Mrs. Gass's goodness of heart. She had untied her bonnet, tilting it to the back of her head without ceremony, and stayed luncheon with them.

Mr. North was alone in his new home, and likely to be ; for his wife had relieved him of her society. Violently indignant at the pro-

spect of removal from such a habitation as the Hall to that small home of the late Mrs. Cumberland's, Madam went off to London with Matilda, and took Sir Nash Bohun's house by storm. Not an hour, however, had she been in it, when Madam found all her golden and aspiring dreams must be scattered to the four winds. Never again would Sir Nash receive her as a guest or tolerate her presence. The long hidden truth, as connected with his unfortunate brother's death, had been made clear to him : first of all by General Strachan, next by Sir William Adair, with whom he became intimate.

What boots it to tell of the interview between Arthur and his mother ? It was of a painful character. There was no out-spoken reproach, there was no loud voice raised. In a subdued manner, striving all the while for calmness, Arthur told her she had wilfully destroyed both himself and Ellen Adair ; her life, for she was dying ; his happiness. He recapitulated all that had been disclosed to him relating to his father's death ; and Madam, brought to bay, never denied its accuracy.

“ But that I dare not presume deliberately

to fly in the face of one of Heaven's express Commandments, I would now cast you off for ever," he concluded in his bitter pain. "Look upon you again as my mother, I cannot. I will help you when you need help; so far will I act the part of a son to you; but all respect for you has been forced out of me; and I would prefer that we should not meet very often."

Madam went off the same day to Germany, Matilda and Parrit, the maid, in her wake. Letters came from her to say she should never go back to Dallory, never; probably never set her foot on British soil again; and therefore she desired that a suitable income might be secured to her abroad.

And so Mr. North had his new residence all to himself—save for Richard. Jelly had taken up her post as his housekeeper, general manager, and upper servant; with a boy and a maid under her; and there was one outdoor gardener. All of whom she domineered over to her heart's content. Jelly was regaining some of her lost flesh, and more than her lost spirits. Set at rest, in a confidential interview with Mr. Richard, as to the very tangible nature of the apparition she had

seen, Jelly was herself again. Mr. North thought his garden lovely, more compact even than the extensive one at the Hall ; he was out in it all day, working a bit between whiles, and felt at peace. Mrs. Gass came to see him often ; Mary Dallory nearly daily : he had his good son Richard to bear him company in an evening : and altogether Mr. North was in much comfort. It had been Richard's intention to take a lodging for himself ; but the departure of Madam changed his plans, and he went into the new house with his father. Dr. Rane's house remained empty : old Phillis, to whom also had been disclosed the truth, being there to take care of it. The doctor's personal effects had been sent to him by Richard.

And that's all that need be said of the changes just yet.

"Ellen looks much better, sir," remarked Arthur Bohun, as he twirled the pink hyacinth he had plucked.

"A little fresher, perhaps, from the country air," answered Sir William.

"I have not lost hope : she may be mine yet," he murmured.

Sir William did not answer. He would

give her to Arthur now with his whole will and heart, had her health permitted it. Arthur himself looked ill; in the last few months he seemed to have aged years. An awful amount of remorse was ever upon him; his life, in its unavailing regret, seemed to be one long agony.

They turned across to where she was sitting. "Would you not like to walk a little, Ellen?" asked her father.

She rose at once. Arthur held out his arm, and she took it. Sir William was quite content that it should be so: Arthur, and not himself. The three paced the lawn. Ellen wore a lilac silk gown and warm white burnouse cloak. An elegant girl yet, though worn nearly to a shadow, with the same sweet face as of yore.

But she was soon tired, and sat down again, Arthur by her side. One of the gardeners came up for some orders, and Sir William went away with him.

"I have not been so happy for many a day, Ellen, as I am this one," began Captain Bohun. "You are looking quite yourself again. I think—in a little while—that you may be mine."

A blush, beautiful as the rose-flush of old, sat for a moment on her cheeks. She knew how fallacious was the hope.

"I am nearly sure that Sir William thinks so, and will soon give you to me," he added.

"Arthur," she said, putting her wan and wasted hand on his, "don't lay the hope to heart. The—the disappointment, when it came, would be all the harder to bear."

"But, my darling, you are surely better!"

"Yes, I seem so, just for a little time. But I fear that I shall never be well enough to be your wife."

"It was so very near once, you know," was all he whispered.

There was no one within view, and they sat, her hand clasped in his. The old expressive silence that used to lie between them of old, ensued now. They could not tell to each other more than they had told. In the most unexpected reconciliation that had come, in the bliss it brought, all had been disclosed. Arthur had heard all about her self-humiliation and anguish; he knew of the treasured violets, and their supposed treachery: she had listened to his recital of the weeks of despair; she had seen the letter, written to him from

Eastsea, worn with his kisses, his tears, and kept in his bosom still. No : of the past there was nothing more to tell each other ; so far, they were at rest.

Arthur Bohun was still unconsciously twirling that pink hyacinth about in his fingers. Becoming awake to the fact, he offered it to her, putting it in her lap. A wan smile parted her lips.

“ You should not have given it to me, Arthur.”

“ Why ?”

Ellen took it up and smelt it. The perfume was very strong.

“ Why should I not have given it to you ?”

“ Don’t you know what the hyacinth is an emblem of ?”

“ No.”

“ Death.”

One quick, pained glance at her. She was smiling yet, and looking rather fondly at the flower. Captain Bohun took both flower and hand into his.

“ I always thought you liked hyacinths, Ellen.”

“ I have always liked them very much in-

deed. And I like the perfume—although it has something in it faint and sickly."

He quietly flung the flower on the grass, and put his boot on it to stamp out its beauty. A nearer emblem of death, now, than it was before : but he did not think of that.

"I'll find you a sweeter flower presently, Ellen. And you know——"

A visitor was crossing the lawn to approach them. It was Mary Dallory. She had not yet been to see Ellen. Something said by Mrs. Gass had sent her now. Happening to call on Mrs. Gass that morning, Mary heard for the first time of the love that had so long existed between Captain Bohun and Miss Adair, and that the course of the love had been forcibly interrupted by Madam, who had put forth the plea to Ellen that her son was engaged to Miss Dallory.

Mary sat before Mrs. Gass in mute surprise, recalling facts and fancies. "I know that Madam would have liked her son to marry me ; the hints she gave me on the point were too broad for me to mistake that," she observed to Mrs. Gass. "Neither I nor Captain Bohun had any such thought or intention ; we understood each other too well."

"Any way, you once took in me," said Mrs. Gass.

Mary laughed. "It was only in sport: I did not think you were serious."

"They believed in it at the Hall."

"Oh, did they? So much the better."

"My dear, I am afraid it was not for the better," dissented Mrs. Gass rather solemnly. "They say that it has killed Miss Ellen Adair."

"What?" exclaimed Mary.

"Ever since that time when she first went to the Hall on Mrs. Cumberland's death, she has been wasting and wasting away. Her father, Sir William, has now brought her to Dallory, not to try if the change might restore her, for nothing but a miracle would do that, but because she took a whim to come. Did you hear that she was very ill?"

"Yes, I heard that."

"Well then, I believe it is nothing else but this business that has made her ill—Captain Bohun's deserting of her for you. She was led to believe it was so—and until then, they were wrapt up in each other."

Mary Dallory felt her face grow hot and cold. She had been entirely innocent of ill-

intention ; but the words struck a strange chill of repentance to her heart.

“ I—don’t understand,” she said in a frightened tone. “ Captain Bohun knew there was nothing between us ; that there was not the shadow of a pretence of it : why did he not tell her better ? ”

“ Because he and she had parted on another score ; they had been parted through a lie of Madam’s, who wanted him to marry you. I don’t rightly know what the lie was ; something frightfully grave ; something he could not repeat again to Miss Adair : and Ellen Adair never heard it, and thought it was as Madam said—that he had turned his love over to you.”

Mary sat as one struck dumb, thinking of the past. There was a long pause.

“ How did you get to know this ? ” she breathed.

“ Ah, well—partly through Mr. Richard. And I sat an hour talking with poor Miss Ellen yesterday, and caught a hint or two then.”

“ I will set it straight,” said Mary ; feeling, though without much cause, bitterly repentant.

“ My dear, it has been all set straight between 'em since the winter. Nevertheless, Miss Mary, 'twas too late. Madam did her crafty work well.”

“ Madam deserves to be drawn through the place at the cart's tail,” was the impulsive rejoinder of Miss Dallory.

She betook herself to the Hall there and then. And this explains her approach. Things had become pretty clear to her as she walked along. She had never been able to account for the manner in which Ellen seemed to have shunned her, to have avoided all approach to intimacy or friendship. That Mary Dallory had favoured the impression that was abroad of Arthur Bohun's possible engagement to her, she was now all too conscious ; or, at any rate, had not attempted to refute it. But she had never thought she was doing harm to any one.

Just as Arthur Bohun had started back when he first saw Ellen in the winter, so did Miss Dallory start now. Wan and wasted ! ay, indeed. Mary felt half sick, to think what share she had held in it.

She said nothing at first. Room was made for her on the bench, and they talked of in-

different matters. Sir William came up, and was introduced. Presently he and Arthur strolled to a distance.

Mary spoke then. Just a word or two, she said, of the misapprehension that had existed ; and burst forth into her exculpation.

“Ellen, I would have died rather than have caused you pain. Oh if I had but known ! Arthur and I were familiar with each other as brother and sister : never a thought of aught else was in our minds. If I let people think there was, why—it was done in a kind of coquetry. I had somebody else in my head, you see, all the while ; and that’s the truth. And I am afraid I enjoyed the disappointment that would ensue for Madam.”

Ellen smiled faintly. “It seems to have been a complication altogether. A kind of ill-fate that I suppose there was no avoiding.”

“You must get well, and be his wife.”

“Ay. I wish I could.”

But none could be wishing that as Arthur was. Hope deceived him ; he confidently thought that a month or two would see her his. Just for a few days the deceitful improvement in her continued.

One afternoon they drove to Dallory churchyard. Ellen and her father; Arthur sitting opposite them in the carriage. A fancy had taken her that she would once more look on Mrs. Cumberland's grave; and Sir William said he should like to see it.

The marble stone was up now, with its inscription, "Fanny, widow of the Reverend George Cumberland, Government Chaplain, and daughter of the late William Gass, Esq., of Whitborough." There was no mention of her marriage to Captain Rane. Perhaps Dr. Rane fancied the name was not in very good odour just now, and so omitted it. The place where the ground had been disturbed, to take up those other coffins, had been filled in again with earth.

Ellen drew Sir William's attention to a green spot near, overshadowed by the drooping branches of a tree that waved its leaves in the breeze, and flickered the grass beneath with ever-changing light and shade.

"It is the prettiest spot in all the churchyard," she said, touching his arm. "And yet no one has ever chosen it."

"It is very pretty, Ellen; but solitary."

"Will you let it be here, papa?"

He understood the soft whisper, and slightly nodded, compressing his lips. Sir William was not deceived. Years had elapsed, but, to him, it seemed to be his wife's case over again. There had been no hope for her; there was none for Ellen.

CHAPTER XVII.

BROUGHT FORCIBLY HOME TO HIM.

BACK in an easy chair she lay, in the little room that was once Mr. North's parlour. The window was flung open to the sweet flowers, to the balmy air; and Ellen Adair drank in alike their beauty and their perfume.

She took to this room as her own sitting-room the day she came back. She liked it. Sir William, seeing that, had caused the shabby old carpet and chairs and tables to be put out, and fresh and bright furniture brought in. How willingly, had it been possible, would he have kept her in life!

Just for a few days had hope lasted—no more. The change in her had come on suddenly, and was unmistakable. She wore a white gown, tied round the waist with a pink girdle, and a little bow of pink ribbon—her favourite colour—at the neck. She sought

to look well yet ; her toilet was attended to, her bright hair was arranged carefully as ever. But the maid did all that. The wan face was very sweet still, the soft brown eyes had all their old lustre. Very listless was the worn-white hand lying on her lap ; loosely sat the plain gold ring on it—the ring that, through all the toil and trouble, had never been taken off. Ellen was alone. Sir William had gone by appointment to see over Richard North's works.

A sound as of steps on the gravel. Her father *could* not have come back yet ! A moment's listening, and then the red hectic flushed her face ; for she knew the step too well. Captain Bohun had returned, then !

Captain Bohun had gone to London to see Sir Nash off on his projected Continental journey to those springs that were to make him young again. Sir Nash had looked for Arthur to accompany him, but he now acknowledged that Ellen's claims were paramount to his. Ellen had thought he might have been back yesterday.

He came in at the glass doors, knowing he should probably find her in the room. But his joyous smile died away when he saw her face.

His step halted ; his already held-out hand dropped at his side.

“ *Ellen!* ”

In a timid, frightened, wailing tone was the word spoken. Only three days’ absence, and she had faded like this ! Was it a relapse ?—or what had she been doing to cause the change ?

For a few minutes, perhaps neither of them was sufficiently collected to know what passed. In his shock of abandonment, he knelt by the chair, holding her hands, his eyes dropping tears. The remorse ever gnawing at his heart was very cruel just then. *Ellen* bent towards him, and whispered that he must be calm—must bear like a man : things were but drawing a little nearer.

“ I should have been down yesterday, but that I waited in town to make sundry purchases and preparations,” he said. “ *Ellen*, I thought that—perhaps—next month—your father would have given you over to me.”

“ Did you ? ” she faintly answered.

“ You must be mine,” he continued, in too deep emotion to weigh his words. “ If you were to die first, I—I think it would kill me.”

“Look at me,” was all she answered. “See whether it is possible.”

“There’s no knowing. It might restore you. The fresh scenes, the warm pure climate that I would take you to—we’d find one somewhere—might do wonders. I pointed this out to Sir William in the winter.”

“But I have not been well enough for it, Arthur.”

“Ellen, it must be! Why, you know; you know that you were almost my wife. Half an hour later, and you would have been.”

She released one of her hands, and hid her face upon it. Captain Bohun grew more earnest in his pleading; he was really thinking this thing might be.

“I shall declare the truth to Sir William Adair—and I know that I ought to have done so before, Ellen. When he shall know how very near we were to being man and wife, he will make no further objection to giving you to me now. My care and love will restore you if any thing can.”

She had put down her hand again, and was looking at him, a little startled and her cheeks hectic.

“Arthur, hush. Papa must never know this while I live. Do as you will afterwards.”

“I shall tell him before the day’s out,” persisted Captain Bohun. And she began to tremble with agitation.

“No, no. I say no. I should die with the shame.”

“What shame?” he rejoined.

“The shame that—that—fell upon me. The shame of—after having consented to a secret marriage, you should have left me as you did, and not fulfilled it, and never told me why. It lies upon me still, and I cannot help it. I think it is that that has helped to kill me more than all the rest. Oh, Arthur, forgive me for saying this! Do not you renew the shame now.”

Never had his past conduct been brought so forcibly home to him. Never had his heart so ached with its repentant pain. He stood up and laid her face upon his breast, and the scalding tears fell from his eyes upon it.

“The fear, lest the secret should be discovered, lay upon me always,” she whispered. “While I was staying here that time it seemed to me one long mental torment, a pain of pro-

longed crucifixion. Had the humiliation come, I could never have borne it. Spare me still, Arthur."

Every word she spoke was like a dagger thrusting its sharp point into his heart. *She* was going—going rapidly—where neither pain nor humiliation could reach her. But he had, in all probability, a long life before him, and must live out his bitter repentance.

"Oh, my love, my love! I wish I could die for you!"

"Don't grieve, Arthur; I shall be better off. You and papa must comfort one another."

He was unconsciously turning round the plain gold ring on her wasted hand, a sob now and again breaking from him. How real the past was seeming to him; even the hour when he had put that ring on, and the words he spoke with it, were very present. What remained of it all? Nothing, save that she was dying.

"I should like to give you this key now, while I am well enough to remember," she suddenly said, detaching a small key from her watch-chain. "It belongs to my treasure-box, as I used to call it at school. They will give it you when I am dead."

"Oh, Ellen!"

“ The other ring is in it, and the licence—for I did not burn it, as you bade me that day in the churchyard; and the two or three letters you ever wrote me; and my journal, and some withered flowers, and other foolish trifles. You can do what you like with them, Arthur; they will be yours then. And oh, Arthur! if you grieve any more now, like this, you will hurt me, for I cannot bear that you should suffer pain. God bless you, my darling, my almost husband! We should have been very happy with one another.”

Lower and lower bent he his aching brow, striving to suppress the anguish, that went well-nigh to unman him. Her own tears were falling.

“ Be comforted,” she whispered; “ Arthur, be comforted! It won’t be for so many years, even at the most; and then we shall be together again, in Heaven!”

* * * * *

And so she died. A week or two more of lingering pain and suffering, and then she was at rest. And that was the ending of one of the sweetest girls this world has ever known—Ellen Adair.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

THE genial spring gave place to a fiery summer; and summer, in its turn, was giving place to autumn. There is nothing of much note to record of the interval; just a passing word of gossip here and there.

Dallory, as regards North Inlet, was no longer a crowded place. The poor workmen, with their wives and families, had mostly drifted away from it; some few were emigrating, some had brought their minds (or, as they expressed it, their stomachs) to accept that last and hated refuge, the workhouse; and they seemed likely, so far as present prospects looked, to be permanent recipients of its hospitality. The greater portion, however, had wandered away to different parts of the country, seeking for that employment they could no longer get in their native place. Poole

and the other conspirators had been tried at the March assizes. Richard North pleaded earnestly for a lenient sentence on them ; and he was listened to. Poole got a term of penal servitude, shorter than it would otherwise have been, and the others hard labour. One and all, including Mr. Poole, declared that they would not willingly have injured Richard North.

So, what with one thing and another, North Inlet had too much room in it, and was now at peace. There was no longer any need of special policemen. As to Richard, he was going on steadily and quietly ; progressing a little, not much. Some five or six men had been added to his small number, of whom Ketlar was one ; Ketlar having, as Jelly said, come to his senses. But the works would never be what they had been. For one thing, Richard had not capital ; and if he had, perhaps he might not now have cared to embark it. Provided he could gain a sufficient income for expenses, and employ his time and energies, it was all he asked.

Madam lived abroad permanently. Mr. North (Richard really) allowed her two hundred a year ; her son Arthur two ; Sir Nash

two. Six hundred a year; but it was pretty plainly intimated to Madam that this income was only guaranteed so long as she kept herself aloof from them. Madam retorted that she liked the continent too well to leave it for snuffy old England.

Matilda North had married a French count, whom they had met at Baden Baden. She, herself, made the announcement to her step-brother Arthur in a self-possessed letter, telling him that as the Count's fortune was not equal to his merits, she should depend upon him (Arthur) to assist them yearly. Sidney North had also married. Tired, possibly, with his most uncertain existence, finding supplies from home were now the exception rather than the rule, and not daring to show his face on English soil to entreat for more, Mr. Sidney North entered into the bonds of matrimony with a wealthy American dame who was a few years older than himself; the widow of a great man who had made his fortune by the oil springs. It was to be hoped he would keep himself straight now.

And Mr. North, feeling that he was securely freed from Madam, was happy as a prince, and confidentially told people that he thought he

was growing young again. Bessy wrote to him weekly; pleasant, happy letters. She liked her new home in the new world very much indeed; and she said Oliver seemed not to have a single care. The new firm, Jones and Rane, had more patients than they could well attend to, and all things were well with them. In short, Dr. and Mrs. Rane were evidently both prosperous and happy. No one was more pleased to know this than Mrs. Gass. *She* flourished; and her beaming face was more beaming than ever when seen abroad, setting the wives of Richard North's workmen to rights, or looking out from behind her geraniums.

Dallory Hall was empty again. William Adair had quitted it, his mission there over. Richard North was thinking about removing the furniture out; but in truth he did not know what to do with it. There was no hurry, for Miss Dallory said she did not intend to let it again at present.

Perhaps the only one not just now in a state of bliss, was Jelly. Jelly had made a frightful discovery of iniquity—Tim Wilks was faithless. For several months now (as it came out) Mr. Wilks had transferred his allegiance

from herself to Molly Green, whom he was courting at Whitborough in secrecy. At least, keeping it from Jelly. The truth was, poor Tim did not dare to tell her. Jelly heard of it in a manner that astounded her. Spending a Sunday at Whitborough, with Mrs. Beverage's servants, Jelly went to morning service at one of the churches. "Fate" took her to that particular church, she said. And there she heard the banns of marriage read out for the first time of asking, between Timothy Wilks, bachelor, and Mary Green, spinster. Jelly nearly shrieked aloud in her indignation. Had the culprits been present, she might have felt obliged to box their ears afterwards in coming out. It proved to be all true. Tim and Molly were going to be married, and Tim was furnishing a pretty cottage at Whitborough.

And that is how matters were at present in Dallory.

One autumn day, when the woods were glowing with their many colours, and the guns might be heard making war on the partridges, Richard North overtook one of his Flemish workmen at the base of a hill about half a mile from his works. The man was wheeling a

wheelbarrow that contained sand, but not in the handy, ready manner that an Englishman would, and Richard took it himself.

“Can’t you learn, Snaude?” he said, addressing the man by name. “Look here; you should stoop: you must not get the barrow nearly upright. See how you’ve spilt the sand.”

Wheeling it along and paying attention to nothing else, Richard took no notice of a basket-carriage that was clattering down the opposite hill. It pulled up when it reached him. Looking up, Richard saw Miss Dallory. Giving the wheelbarrow over to the man, Richard took the hand she held out.

“Yes,” he said, laughing, “you stop to shake hands with me now, but you won’t do it soon.”

“No? Why not?” she questioned.

“You saw me wheeling the barrow along?”

“Yes. It did not look very heavy.”

“I have to put my hands to all sorts of things now, you perceive, Miss Dallory.”

“Just so. I hope you like doing it.”

“Well, I do.”

“But I want to know what you mean by saying I shall soon not stop to speak to you.”

“When you become a great lady. Report says you are about to marry.”

“Does it? Do you still think, sir, I am going to take a Bohun?”

“There has been some lord down at your brother’s place, once or twice. The gossips in Dallory say that he comes for you.”

“Then you can tell the gossips that they are a great deal wiser than I am. Stand still, Gyp”—to the shaggy pony. “I would not have him; and I’m sure he has not the remotest idea of having me. Why, he is hardly out of his teens! I daresay he thinks me old enough to be his godmother.”

Miss Dallory played with the reins, and then glanced at Richard. He was looking at her earnestly, as he leaned on the side of the low carriage.

“That young man has come down for the shooting, Mr. Richard. Frank takes him out to it every day. As for me, I do not intend to marry at all. Never.”

“What shall you do then?”

“Live at Dallory Hall. Frank is going to be married, to the lord’s sister. Now there’s some information for you, but you need not proclaim it. It is true. I shall remove my-

self and my bundles to the Hall, and live in it till I die."

"It will be very lonely for you."

"Yes, I know that," she answered in a sad tone. "Most old maids are lonely. There will be Frank's children, perhaps, to come and stay with me sometimes."

Their eyes met. Each understood the other as exactly as though a host of words had been spoken. She would have *one* man for a husband—if he would have her.

Richard went nearer. His lips were pale, his tones hoarse with emotion.

"Mary, it would not be suitable. Think of your money; your birth. I told you once before not to tempt me. Why you know—you *know* that I have loved you, all along, too well for my own peace. In the old days when those works of ours"—pointing to the distant chimneys—"were of note, and we wealthy, I allowed myself to cherish dreams that I should be ashamed to confess to: but that's all over and done with. It would not be suitable now."

She blushed, and smiled; and turned her head away from him to study the opposite hedge while she spoke.

“For my part, I think there was never anything so suitable since the world was made.”

“Mary, I cannot.”

“If you will please get off my basket-chaise, sir, I'll drive on.”

But he did not stir. Miss Dallory played with the reins again.

“Mary, *how* can I? If you had nothing, it would be different. I cannot live at Dallory Hall.”

“No one else ever shall.” But Richard had to bend to catch the whisper.

“The community would cry shame upon me. Upon the poor man of work, Richard North.”

“How dare you call yourself names, Mr. Richard? You are a gentleman.”

“What would John and Francis say?”

“What they pleased. Francis likes you better than anybody in the world; better than—well, yes, sir—better than I do.”

He had one of her hands now. She knew, she had known a long while, how it was with him—that he loved her passionately, but would never, under his altered circumstances, tell her so. And, moreover, she knew that he was aware she knew it.

“But, Mary, since—since before you returned from Switzerland up to this hour, I have not dared to think the old hopes could be carried out, even in my own heart.”

“You think it better that I should grow into an old maid, and you into an old bachelor. Very well. Thank you. Perhaps we shall both be happier for it. Let me drive on, Mr. Richard.”

He drew her nearer ; he made her turn to him. The great love of his heart shone in his face and eyes. A face of emotion then. She dropped the reins, regardless of what the rough pony might please to do, and put her other hand upon his.

“Oh Richard, don’t let us carry on the farce any longer ! We have been playing it all these months and years. Let us at least be honest with each other : and then, if you decide for separation, why—it must be so.”

But, as it seemed, Richard did not mean to decide for it. He glanced round to make sure that nobody was in the lonely road ; and, drawing her face to his, left some strangely ardent kisses on it.

“I could not give up my works, Mary.”

“Nobody asked you to, sir.”

"It is just as though I had left the furniture in the Hall for the purpose."

"Perhaps you did."

"Mary!"

"There's the pony going. Stand still, Gyp. I won't give up Gyp, mind, Richard. I know he is frightfully ragged and ugly, and that you despise him more than tongue can tell; but I won't give him up. He can be the set-off bargain against your works, sir."

"Agreed," answered Richard, laughing. And he chose to seal the bargain.

Mary said again that she must drive on; and did not. How long they would really have stayed it was impossible to say, but for the man's coming back from the works with the empty wheelbarrow for more sand.

* * * *

And there's no more to say. When the next spring came round, Richard North and his wife were established at Dallory Hall. Somewhere about the time of the marriage, there occurred a little warfare. Mary, who owned a great nest of accumulated money, wanted Richard to take it for his business. Richard steadily refused. A small portion

would be useful to him ; that he would take ; but no more.

“Richard,” she said to him one day, before they had been married a week, “I do think you are more obstinate upon this point than any other. You should hear what Mrs. Gass says about it.”

“She says it to me,” returned Richard, laughing. “There’s not my equal for obstinacy in the world, she tells me.”

“And you know there’s not, sir.”

But the next minute he put aside lightness and grew strangely serious. “I cannot give up business, Mary ; I have already said so—”

“I should despise you if you did, Richard,” she interrupted. “I have money and gentility—I beg you’ll not laugh, sir ; you have work, and brains to work with ; so we are equally matched. But I wish you’d take the money.”

“No,” said Richard. “I will never again enter on gigantic operations, and be at the beck and call of the Trades’ Unions. There’s another reason against it—that it would require larger supervision on my part. And as I have now divided duties to attend to, I shall not increase them. I should not choose

to neglect my works ; I should not choose to neglect my wife."

"A wilful man must have his way," quoth Mary.

"And a wilful woman shall have hers in all things, save when I see that it would not be for her good," rejoined Richard, holding his wife before him by the waist.

"I daresay I shall !" she saucily answered.
"Is that a bargain, Richard ?"

"To be sure." And Richard sealed it as he had the other one some months before.

And so we leave Dallory and its people at peace. Even Jelly was in feather. Jelly, ruling Mr. North indoors, and giving her opinion, unasked, in a free and easy manner whenever she chose, as to the interests of the garden (which opinion poor Mr. North enjoyed instead of reproved, and grew to look for)—Jelly had taken on another "young man," in the person of Mr. Francis Dallory's head gardener. He was a staid young Scotchman ; very respectful to Jelly, and quite attentive. Mr. Seeley had moved into Dr. Rane's old house, and old Phillis was his housekeeper ; so that Jelly's neighbourly relations with the next door were continued as usual.

On Arthur Bohun there remained the greatest traces of the past. Sir Nash was restored to health ; and Arthur, in his never-ceasing remorse, would sometimes hope that he would marry again : he should almost hate to succeed to the rank and wealth to which he had, in a degree, sacrificed one who had been far dearer to him than life. Arthur's ostensible home was with Sir Nash ; but he was fond of coming to Dallory. He had stayed twice with Mr. North ; and Richard's home, the Hall, would be always open to him. The most bitter moments of Arthur Bohun's life were those that he spent with Sir William Adair : never could he get rid of the consciousness of having wronged him, of having helped to make him childless. Sir William had grown to love him as a son—which was but an additional stab for Arthur's aching heart.

And whenever Arthur Bohun came to Dallory, he would pay a visit to a certain white tomb in the churchyard. Choosing a solitary evening for it, after dusk had fallen, and staying by it for hours, there he indulged his dreadful grief. Who can tell how he called upon her ?—who can tell how he poured out all the misery of his repentant heart, praying

to be forgiven ? Neither she nor Heaven could answer him in this world. She was gone ; gone ; all his regret was unavailing to recal her : there remained nothing but the marble stone, and the simple name on it :

“ELLEN ADAIR.”

THE END.



